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Screen Education

Comolli/Thompson: Screen Acting
Script of Straub and Huillet's 'Fortini-Cani'
Brown/Burch/Kuhn: Problems of Documentary

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SEFT offices, October 21

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The *Screen* Editorial Board welcomes manuscripts and proposals for potential articles from contributors. It is very helpful if manuscripts are typed double spaced with wide margins and are suitable for photocopying. Manuscripts will be acknowledged on receipt, submitted to the Board for its consideration and the Board's decision conveyed to the writer.

A *Screen* Readers Meeting to discuss the contents of this issue of the journal with contributors and members of the Editorial Board will take place on Saturday 21st October at 11 am at the SEFT Offices: 29 Old Compton St, London W1V 5PN.

Editorial

For Brecht's epic theatre, as Ben Brewster points out (*Ciné-tracts* v 1 n 2, Summer 1977) it is important that a distinction be maintained throughout the theatrical performance between the actors and the parts they are fictionally playing. The theatre audience both assists at the performance – watching the actors on stage – and also participates in the fiction being presented, seeing these actors no longer as actors but as their fictional roles. There is thus a dual movement, an oscillation of identification and separation: 'One can identify with the actor, which implies a separation from the role, and then identify with the role, and that implies a separation from the actor' (Ben Brewster p 47). Such a separation can be exemplified in the cinema by the practice of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *Fortini-Cani*, the script of which we publish in this number of *Screen*, which sets up and plays with sets of relations of difference, including that between the character 'Fortini' in the film, and the sometime author of the book *I Cani del Sinai*. One can, in retrospect, reply to Brecht's 'fundamental reproach' against the cinema – that it does not allow for distanciation – by instancing not only the work of Straub and Huillet but also the star system as a space within cinema where the contradictions of naturalistic presentation are both manifested and contained, and where a dislocation analogous to epic acting, separating actor and role, is manifested. In the article already mentioned Ben Brewster suggests that the traditional costume picture presents this area of trouble most acutely, for in the costume picture however much attention goes into authenticity in the decor, the stars' clothing presents a kind of compromise between historically authentic costume and clothes the stars would wear in everyday life. In relation to this argument we are pleased to be able to publish Jean-Louis Comolli's 'A body too much', which examines with reference to Jean Renoir's *La Marseillaise* (1938) such a point of disturbance within the related form of historical fiction. Comolli argues that while we are able to identify the actor Ardisson with his fictional role in the film of

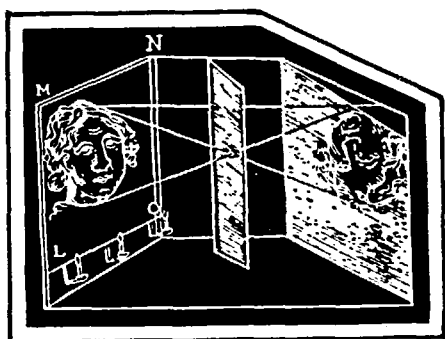
6 Bomier, 'a figure from the lower classes of Marseilles', the film operates a definite separation between Pierre Renoir as actor and Louis XVI as his not-so-fictional role. The operations of cinematic fiction, Comolli continues, force the spectator into 'difficult' and 'dangerous' denegations of this separation: 'the coded is made more visible, the supposedly known more awkward, the belief more problematic'. In his accompanying analysis of screen acting, John Thompson is also concerned to draw attention to the tendency of traditional narrative cinema to efface this distinction between actor and role. The effects of such a work of naturalisation are demonstrated quite succinctly by the application of the semiotic procedure of the commutation test to the study of acting.

If fictional cinema, by virtue of its necessary inscription of acting and its binding together of two potentially contradictory subjectivities within the apparent unity of the 'role', opens up a possible (if constantly effaced or denied) space of distancing, documentary cinema by contrast appears to offer no such means of disrupting or subverting the positionality of the spectator. In documentary cinema, one of the guarantees of 'veracity' is that people do not act, they are typically 'themselves', performance and recording are elided. It is exactly the problematic status of actors and acting which may constitute one aspect of the evidently disturbing nature of, for instance, certain forms of drama documentary. From an opposite direction, it arises also as a 'trouble' in those types of documentary which mobilise intra- and extra-textual codes signifying unmediated representation (and therefore, apparently, 'truth', or at least non-fictionality), but which at the same time inscribe elements of narrativity (and therefore connote fictionality): a telling example of this is the public outcry which attended the televising of the BBC series *The Family* (1974) – it is noteworthy that much of the controversy hinged on the 'typicality' or otherwise of the Wilkins family and their behaviour. The evident unease surrounding certain documentary or quasi-documentary representations, particularly when considered in terms of their dominant institutional context of production and exhibition – television, finds a parallel in some of the difficulties faced by attempts to construct a meta-language for documentary cinema, attempts which are constantly dogged by the impenetrability of the self-legitimatising discourse of documentary itself, a discourse which tends to hinge on such notions as visibility, evidence and (even if avowedly relative) truth. Bill Nichols' article 'Documentary theory and practice' (*Screen* v 17 n 4) was an attempt in this magazine to engage with this extremely difficult area, in this instance by bringing to bear on documentary cinema some of the notions of filmic address developed in analyses of fiction films. Bill Nichols restricted his consideration of address to documentary films with voice-over, pointing only briefly to the absence of critical work on the 'indirect address' utilised, he argued, particularly rigorously

in American *cinéma vérité* (Bill Nichols p 41). Annette Kuhn's 7
article in this issue takes up this debate around address in documentary film insofar as it assigns a central place to an *observational* mode of address in films which operate little or no direct address through voice-over. Such films, she suggests, inscribe a particular fetishisation of the visible, whereby the spectator is held in the same position as the camera operator and the camera. Ethnographic film is a limit case of such a mode of address for here the visible-as-recordable is mapped over the visible-as-evidence and thereby invokes a category already constituted within the institutionalised academic discourse – that of anthropology – which presides over the construction of the ethnographic film as a type of documentary. Debates on ethnographic film are at the centre of Liz Brown's article which examines the textual functioning of an ethnographic film produced for television, *Some Women of Marra-kech*. She argues that the film's articulation of a feminist discourse limits the hold of its ethnographic discourse. In his article Noël Burch develops a number of observations about the privileged role of the documentary in British film history and suggests that two recent films operating within the context of the 'documentary on art' actually effect displacements of the dominant documentary mode.

Finally we would like to draw the attention of readers to a number of changes in SEFT personnel. In the Autumn Manuel Alvarado takes up a new post at the University of London Institute of Education. We would like to welcome his successor to the post of Education Officer for SEFT and Editorial Officer for *Screen Education*, James Donald. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has taken up the post of head of the Educational Advisory Service of the British Film Institute. With the production of this issue Mark Nash takes up the post of Editorial Officer for *Screen*.

ANNETTE KUHN
MARK NASH



camera obscura

A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory/2

The Avant-Garde and Its Imaginary by Constance Penley
Introduction to Arnold Schoenberg's "Accompaniment for a Cinematographic Scene" : Straub/Huillet :Brecht :Schoenberg
 by Martin Walsh

Hitchcock, The Enunciator by Raymond Bellour

Le Défilement /A View in Close-Up by Thierry Kuntzel

The *Défilement* Into the Look by Bertrand Augst

Comment Ca Va? (Jean-Luc Godard) by Bertrand Augst

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles
 (Chantal Akerman) by Janet Bergstrom

La Femme du Gange (Marguerite Duras) by Elisabeth Lyon

What Maisie Knew (Babette Mangolte) by Constance Penley

WOMEN WORKING

Chantal Akerman

The Legend of Maya Deren Project

Marguerite Duras

Histoire d'Elles

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 only please)*

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Introduction

We print here an English translation of the script of the film by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, *Fortini/Cani*. The translation has been made from a copy of the shooting-script supplied by the authors; but certain modifications have been made, either by the authors or by the translator, to bring it into line with the film as finished. Passages of the original spoken text which are not rendered in the English (or French) sub-titles to the film are given in square brackets.

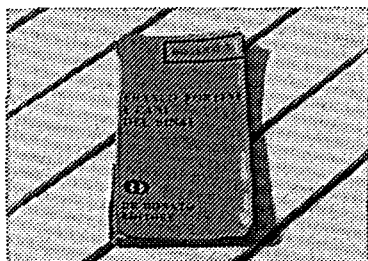
The importance of publishing a full script of *Fortini/Cani* (as of *History Lessons* – see *Screen* v 17 n 1, Spring 1976) lies not in the abstract ‘merits’ of the film, but its textual strategy, in the particular relation it sets up between mise-en-scène and language. On the one hand there is the fact that the spoken words require to be heard (and the written ones to be read), and this, in a foreign-language film, is not easily achieved at the time of viewing, since dubbing is out of the question and there are limits to the load that sub-titles can be expected to carry: hence the decision, here, to reproduce Franco Fortini’s text as spoken in the film, in its entirety. But on the other hand there is also the question of the choice of images in relation to the spoken text, and the timing of the conjunctions between word and image: hence, therefore, the further decision to lay out the text with full camera indications and stills. And one might add, thirdly, a feature peculiar to the Straub-Huillet’s method of film-making, the reliance of their films on a sub-text which does not form part of the signifying pattern of the film but which underpins it and can be spoken outside the film. Thus it is important to know – even if the film does not announce the fact – that a particular shot was filmed at Marzabotto, where a Lidice-like massacre took place towards the end of the war, and not in just any pretty mountain village in Central Italy. Hopefully,

10 the script will enable readers to unpick some of the dense textual and sub-textual structure of the film.

An important feature of the film is the relation of difference it sets up between its points of enunciation. This fact was noted by Mark Nash and Steve Neale in their article in a recent issue of *Screen* (v 17 n 4), and is interestingly corroborated by Fortini himself in a letter to Straub, written at the time when he agreed to take part in the film. Having noted the relation of difference and distance set up in their earlier films between pre-text (Brecht, Schönberg etc) and the eventual filmic text, Fortini adds: 'It is therefore clear that the character in the film of *I cani del Sinai* [Fortini reading from a book written by himself] is not exactly the author of that little book nor yet the "I" who am writing to you now.' And again: 'I understand that your warning to me not to trust you meant that there was to be no visible complicity between you and me-as-character or even (in spite of everything) the literalness of my words in *Cani*. Perhaps you won't treat me with the critical distance you used in the letter to Kandinsky; but a critical distance there will be, and thanks to that I too shall be carried a stage forward.' It is therefore not as 'author' that Fortini puts himself forward in the film, but as participant in a process of textual production; nor is it a promotion of 'authors' that we are printing this script.

The text spoken by Franco Fortini (who appears in the credits under his original name of Franco Lattes) is from his book *I cani del Sinai*, De Donato, Bari 1967.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH



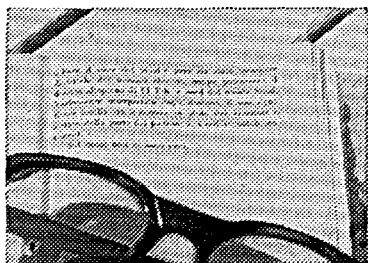
- 1 *Big close up. Fixed angle over the cover of the book:*

DISSENSI 5
Franco Fortini
I CANI
DEL SINAI
De Donato
Editore

Music

Title, white on black:

Film by Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, with Franco
Lattes, Luciana Nissim, Adriano Aprà



- 2 *Big close-up. Fixed angle on the prefatory page of the book which reads:*

'To act the Sinai dog' is apparently a dialect phrase of the nomads who crossed the desert plateau of El Tih to the north of Mount Sinai. Variouslly interpreted by scholars, its meaning fluctuates between 'to run to the help of the victor', 'to be on the side of the masters', 'to display noble sentiments'. There are no dogs on Sinai.

12 3 *Black screen*

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: People don't like having to change their minds. When they have to, they do so in secret. The certainty of having been tricked turns into cynicism. Gain for the cause of conservatism. [The indifferent are its surest allies.]

4 *TV screen in large blow-up giving Italian television news from June 1967. Arrigo Levi announces the outbreak of war between Israel and Egypt.*

LEVI: [Since this morning there has been fighting on the frontiers of the state of Israel, particularly on the Egyptian front between the Negev desert and the Sinai peninsula. What we feared, what everybody feared, has come true. War has once again enveloped a part of the world so dear to all peoples and already so torn apart, by the conflicts of the last twenty years; it has enveloped populations who have already suffered so much. For the last two weeks, that is since the withdrawal of the UN troops and the blockade of the gulf of Akaba, the armies on both side . . . on both sides have been confronting each other on a war footing. Attempts have been made on various sides to seek a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and both sides have been urged not to commit irrevocable acts. The efforts at mediation protracted over long and, alas, inconclusive sessions of the Security Council have unfortunately not succeeded in avoiding the confrontation. A few hours after the outbreak of hostilities the Secor . . . the Security Council has however met again in New York, while on every side, that of U Thant, of the Pope, of President Johnson, appeals have been launched in favour of a ceasefire. But the fighting continues. News about the origin of the conflict is contradictory: the Israelis accuse Egypt, and the Egyptians Israel, of having been the first to attack . . .]

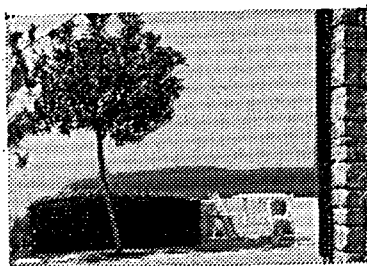
VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI (over): My name must not count. I am information, service to the public; I represent democracy, 'fair play', civilisation, the good.

LEVI: [. . . During the morning fighting has taken place mainly on the border between Israel and Egypt. According to first Israeli reports, on the radio and in the press, Israeli forces were advancing in hard fighting.]

5 *Black screen*

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: The Israeli war unleashed in the new Italian petty bourgeoisie the wish to be on the right side, which it had briefly enjoyed at the time of Kennedy and John XXIII and to free itself from Fascist guilt – the only guilt which, partially, and then only in the form of German Nazism, that class is prepared to recognise – and to turn against the Arab the hatred accumulated against the generation of its

fathers, poverty, the peasant mother, exuberance, rags, military 13
pomp, illiteracy . . .



- 6 Medium and long shot: the sea, seen from the terrace of the Casa Catrin at Cotoncello, Isle of Elba; in the left foreground a small pink laurel tree (close to the point of view of Franco Fortini in shots 21, 23 and 27).
(lens 17.5)

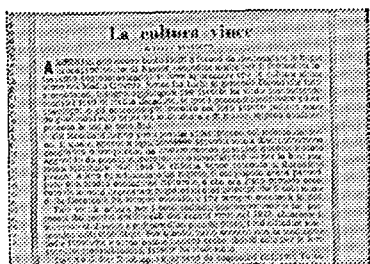
VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: Thirty years earlier, one July I think, in front of the same sea, in a family hotel, my father's copy of the *Corriere della Sera*: something had started to happen there where the sun was setting, in Spain. When was it that they killed those blacks in America? [last summer, or the summer before?] Memory serves to level everything.

On the asphalt of the streets the fresh blood congeals again where it flowed before in years past.

Nothing must change.

- 7 Black screen

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: There exists no perspective; there is no scale of priorities. You must take part now in this fictitious passion, as you have already done with other apparent passions. You must not have the time to pause. You must prepare yourself to forget everything, and quickly. You must make ready not to be or to wish anything.



- 8 Big close-up: some paragraphs by Arrigo Benedetti in *L'Espresso*, entitled 'Culture wins'.

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: What can one say about the bourgeois-radical press? About Benedetti in *L'Espresso*? And the initiatives of solidarity, the blood donors bitterly surprised by the thought that their blood might be sent to run in the veins of bloodless Arabs, the volunteers, all this atmosphere of flood, earthquake, India to feed, with the mess underneath, the chain of solidarity, the air thick with the *obiter dicta* of consensus.

'Let's quit talking about imperialism', protests an intellectual, who perhaps fears accusations of political fickleness – without realising that he has always been a coherent defender of the interests of his own class. [And he adds,] 'Each has his own: the Americans have Vietnam, the Arabs have Israel.' [I must have replied, 'Yes, yes.'] 'That Nasser, I could strangle him with my own hands', a woman teacher says to me, her eyes aflame, mother of two children; and she makes the gesture. [Two cars, parked in front of my house, have stickers on them, another lightning expression of advertising genius: 'I support Israel'. I shall not dare to write on mine, 'I support the Vietcong': I care about the paintwork and the tyres.] One after another, day after day, news of A or B of C, Jews and non-Jews, who join in the chorus.



9 *Medium shot: she who speaks (Luciana Nissim)*

A WOMAN: Yes, I understand, you're right. But it's stronger than me. When the Jews are threatened.

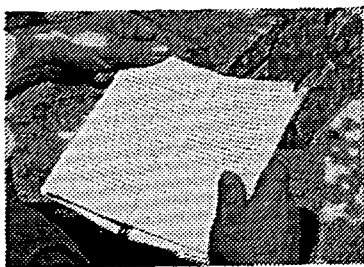
Natural sound



A MAN: But it's my other fatherland. But anti-Semitism exists.

11 *Black screen*

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: I meet M. He's Israeli, brought up on a kibbutz, and works in Milan. He evaluates the situation, explains, reasons. Not a single word of that anti-Arab racism which soils our newspapers.



12 *Close shot: Cotoncello, Isle of Elba. The book, open at pages 22-23, on the knees and in the hands of Franco Fortini reading from it, seated in a wicker chair on the terrace of the Casa Catrin where we shall encounter him again in shots 21, 23 and 27. (lens 17.5)*

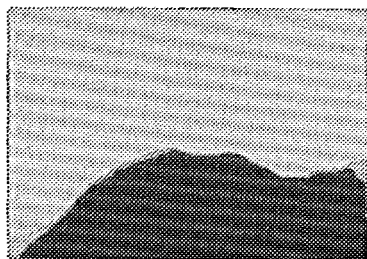
FRANCO FORTINI: Jewish relatives give notice of their surprise at my public silence and express their disapproval.

A niece of mine, it appears, is staying near the Syrian border [where there has been firing (she has since returned safe and sound).] I ring up for news. The first words [however are not to communicate to me a quite comprehensible agitation but] to ask me if it is true what people are saying that I 'have publicly taken up position against Israel'. I reply that I have not taken up any position, and I realise that my reply is not appreciated.

Ten days later I hear about a poster signed by one of those apparently mysterious bodies which flourish in electoral or emotional periods, [put up in Rome and Florence and reported in various newspapers.] It celebrates the defence of the values of civilisation performed by the Israelis and then lists thirty or so names, including mine: people, [the manifesto adds,] who had refused to join in this defence because they had sold their souls to the Italian Communist Party (PCI).

Since it is not true that I share the anti-Israel theses of the PCI, I am therefore supposed to declare my solidarity with Israel... [I know the method.]

Do they want to open a file on me? These pages are my file.



13 Long shot: S Anna di Stazzema (1).

*The camera is on the road which goes up to the village, lower down than the village, on the other side of the valley. Pan from left to right of approximately 220°, following the crest which rises towards the village on the other side, and passing over the village as far as the abandoned mine above the road on the near side.
(lens 25 or 17.5)*

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: The local councils in the Apuan Alps, where twenty-three years earlier Reder and his men butchered hundreds of people, declare themselves opposed to the request for pardon, following their colleagues at Marzabotto.*



Pan from right to left of about 90°, from the mine back over the village as far as the church on the hillside opposite, with the ossuary above.

14 Long shot: S Anna di Stazzema (2).

Horizontal pan 360°, right to left, starting from the church and the ossuary high on the crest, passing along the mountain, opposite the other side of the road, above the chapel down at the entrance to the village, and over the houses and the cemetery, to return on the ossuary and the church.

The camera is in the cultivated field, on the level ground to the right of the road where it enters the village, above the chapel and

* Marzabotto, shown in shot 20 of the film, is another village in the Apennines where a notorious massacre took place.

the car park.

(lens 9)

Synchronous natural sound.

17

15 Long shot. San Terenzo – Bardine – (Ceserano) – Valla. Pan from right to left about 325°, starting from the castle of San Terenzo, passing Bardine as it goes down the valley and coming up again to Ceserano, to halt – a little below – at the place called Valla, at a farm surrounded by cypress trees. The camera is on the concrete roof of the water tower which dominates the valley of Bardine, on the Valla road beyond the castle of Terenzo, between the latter and Valla.

(lens 12.5)

Synchronous natural sound.

16 Medium-long/medium-close shot. Vinca (1). Pan 360°, left to right, starting from the monument surrounded by cypress trees erected on a little esplanade in front of the church, passing over the upper slopes of the mountain which can be seen between the monument and the vicarage on the left of the church façade, then over other mountain tops behind the church, to return to the monument, on the right of which a part of the village can be seen in the background. The camera is in the left-hand corner of the monument esplanade. (lens 12.5 or 17.5)



17 Medium and medium-close shot. Vinca (2). Upward pan starting from the inscription of the monument, with legible text:

Vinca

the flame which burnt destructive
through German barbarity
may recall

enclosed in the marble of your mountains
the martyrdom of your people

[24.8.1944

24.8.1945]

It passes over the stone flame which crowns the monument, arriving at the sky above flanked by cypress trees. The camera

- 18 is at the foot of the monument, facing it.
(lens 17.5)

For the remainder of the series of landscape shots the film as finished diverges markedly from the script version. In place of shots 18-20, there are, in order: a long left to right pan over mountain crests, which then tilts down and pans left into the valley before rising again to the crest line; a left to right pan from open country into a village; a shot similar to number 18 in the script, but in the reverse direction, beginning rather than finishing on the wall plaque; a right to left pan which reveals a valley, a road in the foreground crossing the valley, and a building; and finally a shot which is as number 20 except that the camera pans round for 2½ circles and not just the one circle as indicated.

18 Medium-long and medium shot. San Leonardo, Fosse del Frigido. Horizontal pan, left to right, about 170°, starting from a fountain (beneath a tree on the left of the church) behind which one hears the crossroads, with the asphalt road and the bridge. It passes across the façade of the church and the wall on its right; in the space between the dyke, the sky and reeds can be seen. It finishes on a wall plaque which reads:
(lens 17.5)

[A hearth burning with living fire at the beginning of Nazi-fascist oppression released the spark which enflamed its sons to resistance; it overcame hunger through the legendary sacrifices of its women and children who shed their blood on these inaccessible paths; it suffered slaughter, devastation and atrocious reprisals in every village; but it stayed true to its native mountains and made the Apuan region an unvanquished citadel of liberty. For nine months of epic battle it showed its contempt for the enemy and defeated him; it sanctified its grief for the blood of the fallen, offering this as a libation for the defence of its land and the redemption of the fatherland.

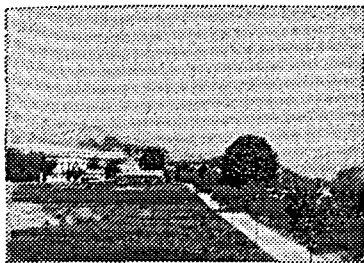
September 1943-April 1945]

The camera is at the foot of the wall, a little to the right of the plaque.

19 Long and medium-close shot. Bergiola. Pan from left to right of about 250°, starting from the sea and the plain, with the entrance road to the village in the foreground. It passes over the crest of the mountains on the other side of the road and over the church which can be seen from the village up above on the near side of the road, to finish on the side wall of the school which dominates this entrance road.

*The camera is to the left of the road, on a mound a little lower than the school.
(lens 17.5)*

19



20 Long shot, Marzabotto. Horizontal pan 360°, left to right, beginning from the little museum of Etruscan archaeology on the left of the field and from what can be seen of the village down in the Reno valley to the right of the field, passing over the poppy field in the foreground which descends towards the valley, and over the paper mill below this field along the river, then circling the mountains which surround the plateau of the Etruscan town, to return to the little museum.

The camera is on the roof of the corrugated iron shed to the right of the path leading to the excavations, or else on a scaffold about the same height as the shed (to avoid having the shed in the field of view of the pan).

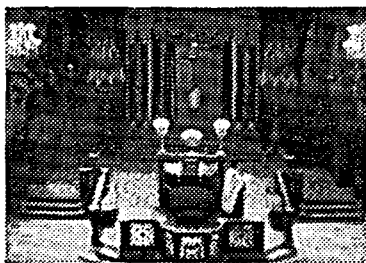
(lens 12.5)

Synchronous natural sound.

21 Close shot. Contoncello, Isle of Elba. Camera angled slightly downwards on Franco Fortini who is in half-profile right with the text he is holding on his knee out of frame. He is seated in the wicker chair (as in shot 12) in front of the bougainvilleas on the terrace of the Casa Catrin; behind him on his right are the little wall and the embankment of barren earth.

(lens 9)

FRANCO FORTINI: There has been a very real way of forgetting those dead: the way used by the Italian ruling classes in the first decades after the war. Today they would rather talk about the Nazi massacres than look at the truth of Indonesia, Vietnam, Latin America, the Congo . . . At bottom there is a single hard, ferocious fact: 'You are not where what decides your destiny happens. You have no destiny. You have nothing and you are nothing. In exchange for reality you have been given a perfect appearance: an imitation of life. So well distracted are you from thoughts of death, you enjoy a sort of immortality. [Happy ones, for whom the enactment of life will never end.]'



22 *Medium-long and medium-close shot. Florence. Liturgical service in the synagogue. Fixed angle from gallery, facing the dais with the scrolls in front of which the rabbi is officiating, together with his assistants. The rabbi chants from the Book of Numbers, IV i-xx. After a while the voice-over enters. (lens 25)*

FRANCO FORTINI: Among the motives which were turning me into an anti-fascist between the ages of seventeen and twenty, my condition of being the son of a Jew was far from determinant. I would not have been able to say at the time to what extent my father's fairly typical history – brought up in Livorno by a family which was not at all rich and which had come, I think, from Spain via Montpellier, and had emerged out of exchanges and marriages with other Mediterranean Sephardim (his grandmother was from Tunis) – had led him to choose, during the first years of this century, a variety of bourgeois, democratic-republican ideology which I imagine as being akin to Freemasonry, and informed by the outspoken moralism and Jacobin heritage of Carducci and Victor Hugo. Even to this day I do not know who served the cause of Italian bourgeoisie in its current evolution best: people like my father, with his attachment to the principles of 1789, [his store of rhetorical quotations like 'And the people cried: "Go to thy son";' or 'I, the priest of august truth';] or the rich Jewish bourgeoisie, the bankers, professors and businessmen, who were then orientated towards Anglo-Saxon (and increasingly American) models, who conserved the old traditions and promoted the 'Jewish homeland' in Palestine [(my father, obviously, felt contradictory emotions of envy and hostility to these);] or the Fascists, instruments of industrial development, with their two aspects, subversive populism and state capitalism, the latter of which was victorious, preparing the Italy of today. The boy I was experienced no conflict between paternal and maternal tradition. What touched his imagination in Judaism was not the incomprehensible rites in the synagogue to which his father occasionally took him. His first knowledge of a lack of love and curiosity came with the certainty that his father did not believe in those rituals and pious

gestures. When he was introduced to his father's relatives or acquaintances who wore the tallith on their shoulders as if dressed for a secret ceremony he sensed in them not faith but rather a reproach, as if they expressed a difference he could not yet decipher. [One passover he was a guest in the house of an uncle and aunt who were religious, and caused a scandal because he wanted to eat bread when everyone else was being fed on wafers.] He was to learn later that the difference was political and came from his father. He was a boy of eight, ten, twelve years old between 1925 and 1929 – the years of the consolidation of Fascism. In 1925 the Fascists came for his father intending to kill him and after that his father was the black sheep of the family. On the other hand, at ten and eleven there had been an exhilarating, liberating encounter with the Scriptures – the Psalms, Job, Isaiah – which he had read [and reread with terror and rapture.] But there had been nothing in those pages which could bring him back to the faith of his fathers. [He did not connect his feeling, so frequent in adolescents, of being different and being somehow 'called' to his being 'exempt' from religious instruction classes. But not even] such of the Christian tradition as had filtered into his family would have helped him to move outside the terms of his situation; Catholicism was something confused with the State, the Fascists, and the teachers at school.

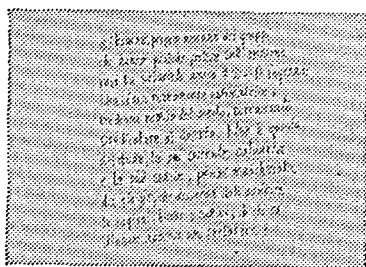
The chanting continues.

23 *Close shot, as 21.*

FRANCO FORTINI: I must have been about fourteen or fifteen. With some young Jews a bit older than myself [– one of them, I recall, had brought to the house a metal collecting-box with the star of David on it to get contributions to buy land in Israel, and I can still remember myself with the aid of a table knife trying to extract from it the coins I myself had generously entrusted to that pious receptacle –] I had gone, a couple of times, to some Zionist meetings in a dark room off Piazza Donatello in Florence. I seem to remember hearing a lecture there on Theodor Herzl, the father of the Zionist movement. One evening there was a group of young people there from Central Europe, headed for Israel. They had begun singing and dancing in a ring some sort of traditional dance. In the face of this I had felt a sense of shame, a sense of being present at an exhibition, [an inappropriate homage to the sectarian spirit. As the room rang with the rhythmic clapping and stamping of these young men and women.] I fled, together with my friends, and walked through the dark sidestreets listening to them wax indignant against Zionist nationalism,

disgusted, enraged.

The antipathy of the assimilated towards tradition! The enlightenment faith in a liberty emblazoned with the tricolor of the French revolution. Hitler was rising to power. What could I know about all that? I had a long way to go to understand the sense of those popular dances: to the courtyards of Milan in the summer of 1945; and to Peking, on Tian-An-Min Square, in the autumn of 1955.



24 Big close-up, fixed angle on the following text written by Franco Fortini in his own hand with red ink on white paper:

'None, but none of the groups
which have power over opinion
do you want to keep friendly to you?'
Oh naïve idea, crudely vain,
to believe myself the enemy of the world, the angry
preacher in the desert. Is not this,
after all, the most consistent
calumny and the subtlest, because masked
by praise, [which saves one listening
to the reasons, good or bad, of him who knows
himself merely to be their bearer.]

25 Close-up on copy of the Daily Mail, with headline of article by Bernard Levin entitled 'This dangerous talk of Jews shirking their duty . . .'

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: Bernard Levin, journalist on the Daily Mail: 'I cannot tolerate being called an anti-Semite just because on certain issues I am not in agreement with Israel, and I will not allow myself to be lumped together with racialists just because I deny to Israel a racial solidarity in which I do not believe.'

But [when it comes to political choices and judgements,] then it is ridiculous for anyone who takes as his touchstone the class conflict on a world scale to talk in terms of 'I cannot tolerate' or 'I will not allow'. Anyone who knows that class conflict is the last conflict to be visible because it is the first in importance is outside of any natural 'right', is one

of the 'ignoble', the 'despised things of the world', the 'things which are not' – and must, in a certain sense, 'tolerate' and 'allow' false accusations. 23

[I claim to know (as Sartre has taught us in a book still valid, today) that the degree of 'anti-Semitism' present in someone who is or has been considered a Jew is only the self-destructive aversion, the morbid objectification, of the bad conscience and the sense of guilt inevitable, not in the modern bourgeois but in that 'historic' bourgeoisie which, as the Young Marx recognised, *creates* the Jew, makes him the double, and indeed the ideal type, of his own self. As for racism, am I perhaps not aware of sharing in a variety of racisms? Of denying *de facto* recognition of a full human identity to certain human categories and privileging others, on the basis of biological determinations (as for example with women), or cultural (so-called 'educated readers'), or historical (the 'bourgeoisie', the 'Germans'): things from which I would claim – that is, pretend – to be exempt and free? But enough. There is no need to be too generous with certain adversaries.] For example with those who tolerated without disgust hearing or reading much the same arguments used against the Arabs as those which the Hitler press formulated thirty years earlier against the 'Jude', and which have been made, if possible, even more repugnant by a pedagogic-democratic veneer – since for the Nazi the Jew was irrecuperable, whereas the ragged, gesticulating, illiterate Arab, incapable of handling modern weapons etc, can still 'progress' if educated in respect for Western values . . . Against such people one cannot be too 'anti-Semitic' or 'racist' – if those adjectives are synonymous with 'the enemy'.

26 *Big close-up. As 24, but different text:*

[I must speak of something I do not know yet
and would like to know. A little truth,
even belated, can be useful.]

I do not yet know, and find it hard to know,
what in the last fifty years

has been the history of the European
and Italian petty bourgeoisie;
and my own, if you will allow me.

If we want to change reality it is as well
to know something more about this immediate past.

27 *Close shot. As 21.*

FRANCO FORTINI: If to label with the same adjective the hostility of the Romanian peasantry to the merchant class (which in that country was originally composed solely of Jews) and that of the anti-Dreyfusard and Pétainiste French petty

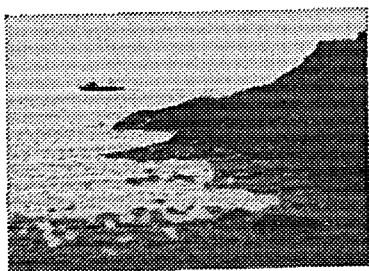
bourgeois and smallholders, is merely an error, to call anti-Semitic a disapproval of Israeli policies is pure effrontery. The anti-Semitism I am referring to is 'a passionate effort to realise a national union against the division of society into classes', a 'mythical and bourgeois representation of the class struggle'. [And Sartre adds, with a clear intuition of today: 'It demonstrates the separation of men and their isolation within the community, the conflict of interests, the dismembering of feelings; it can exist only in collectivities in which a rather weak solidarity unites strongly structured pluralities: it is a phenomenon of social pluralism.']



The more I look at the events of the last quarter century, the more I am confirmed in the idea that 'historic' anti-Semitism has entered a phase of withering away, and indeed its death-throes, precisely because its structure is reproduced and multiplies prodigiously within modern society. The contemporary anti-Semitism of the Russians, which never underwent the bourgeois-democratic interruption of the 19th century West and indeed raged continuously throughout the century, has either been a survival of the past – a past that continued beyond the Civil War because of the frequent peasant identification of Jew and Bolshevik and was then rekindled to the point of persecution and exploited by the chauvinism and nationalism of the Stalin period; or else it has been (and probably continues to be) a neo-formation, similar to the already seasoned Western forms, growing up on top of traditional elements and spreading with the aid of the petty-bourgeois aspects of the bureaucratic strata, the mythic 'proprietors' of the 'Soviet fatherland' (and the Great-Russian primacy [within it],) throughout the so-called 'construction of socialism in one country'.

The most recent forms of 'hatred for difference' were, however, born in the USA. Bourgeois anti-Semitism [in general] grew up there [(and there is massive sociological and literary documentation to prove it)] within a system which has always been one of minorities and ghettos. [Look at the substance:] the multiplication of intermediate bodies – (so idol-

ised by Catholic ideologues as a guarantee against totalitarianism) – when actuated under the objective pressure of industrialism, creates in the place of the class struggle [the (retrograde because fictitious)] struggle of each sub-group against the other, the hate of all against all. [This xenophobia is naturally accompanied by a decrease in the antiquated and traditional forms of racism. Democratic-egalitarian ideology becomes the breeding ground of a thousand 'denials of humanity' to one's neighbour.] Racist or anti-Semitic ideologies on the Nazi model disappear because they are useful only to outmoded nationalisms, and the spirit of anti-somebody irrationalism is the response to the total dispossession of individuals and is the contemporary form of the irrationalism and nationalism which went up in flames in Hitler's Europe. The more the traditional petty bourgeoisie has become identified with employees in the tertiary sector and has come to include a large section of the working class, the more One-Dimensional Man has [necessarily] had to create for himself passions, nations, devotions, fictitious loyalties. Anti-Semitism disappears by multiplying itself. The phrase 'One is always somebody's Jew' becomes true to the letter.



28 Medium and long shot. Cotoncello, Isle of Elba. A rocky coastline and waves coming in diagonally in the moonlight. The camera is on the shore.

Silence.

(lens 25)

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: I would never have understood anything if I hadn't lived in the midst of fugitives from Europe, in the Hitler winters, tilling the soil or peeling potatoes and washing up, surrounded by the speech of Jews old and young, from Galicia and Hungary, Poland and Dobruja, Holland and Slovakia. I listened to them, in those two winters in Switzerland, to the ritual songs rising from [the cellars of a building converted into a synagogue, with the tabernacle made of boards nailed together.] during the days of Kippur, October 1943, and to the wild screams when, on 21st July 1944, there arrived the false rumour of Hitler's death in the Stauffenberg plot. I

sang with them on the day of the liberation of Paris; I went through with them in silence the all too brief list of the survivors of Theresienstadt. The dead are so many, I cannot recall them now. But at least the name of Gianni Pavia, who wanted to return from Switzerland to fight the Germans and ended up killed immediately; and at least that summer night in 1946 when I helped hundreds of survivors from Central Europe [to escape from our coasts, and to embark them secretly on one of those decrepit ships they had been able to get hold of and which would never have survived a sudden storm,] in the attempt to force the English blockade and land in Israel.

29 Medium and long shot. Florence, Via dei Servi. Horizontal pan, left to right, about 95°, beginning from the street sign 'Via dei Servi' over the front of the bar on the corner with the Piazza SS Annunziata; then passing along the façades of the houses on the same side of the street, to end on the dome of the cathedral which blocks the view at the far end of the street, and bringing into frame the façades of the houses on the near side of the street. Camera tilts down to eye level.



The camera is facing the bar from across the road at the corner with Piazza SS Annunziato, on a low wall or bank surrounding the palace. Silence till the end of the pan, then voice over.
(lens 25)

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: When Fascist legislation began, [confusedly,] in 1939, to take effect, my father had tried to have himself 'discriminated', [as the phrase went]. He had been a volunteer in the first world war. So he should know that Fascist law recognised that attribute and allowed him to continue to practice his profession as a lawyer. He had pretended not to remember how often he had spoken up during the political trials of the 1922-25 period, the beatings he had suffered, his arrest for supposed collaboration on Gaetano Salvemini's small opposition paper, *Don't Give In!* In the face of the conquerors he had withdrawn into seclusion. He had not asked for the party card. He had hoped that they would forget him. For years his 'Lawyer's Studio' was advertised on

a green marble plate in the same street as the 'Casa del Fascio', the Florentine Party Federation. [He just had to cross the street to get a shave at the same barber who trimmed the hair or the whiskers of the party bosses.] He had signed up his son in the youth organisation, the 'Avanguardisti', [on reaching secondary school.] And how happy he had seemed when [— proof of their recognition of how 'bright' the lad was —] they had sent him, the son, to the 'Lictorials of Art and Culture', as they called certain annual competitions and debates which the Fascist authorities organised among students throughout the country. He had been full of emotion when he went to see him off at the station, as if he had been going off to who knows what war. [The boy wore boots, borrowed from a friend, the black shirt, the student beret.] And had there not also been at the 'Avantguardist' gatherings the two sons of the lawyer Consolo, who lived with their mother in a rented apartment on the floor below us? And yet those two boys could not have forgotten the night of 3rd October 1925 when the Blackshirts had invaded the house and in their presence had shot their father dead with revolvers. The lawyer Consolo had been my father's partner, his 'studio comrade' [as they say, and I can remember as a child having once seen him when I went with my mother to my father's office.] But I did not keep company with those boys, nor did my family visit their home. Out of prudence, of course.

Natural sound.

30 Long shot. Florence, the town and the hills. Fixed angle until near the end of the text, looking over the part of the town around the synagogue (prison of the Murate and the tower of Piazza Piave on the right, with Arno, in the foreground). The camera is mounted below the Piazzale Michelangelo to the left (as seen when facing the town).
(lens 9)

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: All this was a waste of time. The past was too recent — only thirteen years since 1925 — and my father laboured in vain preparing memoranda for His Excellency Bocchini, Chief of Police, exalting his feelings of devotion to the regime. Nothing doing, he had always been 'beige', as the Florentines said, that is an anti-Fascist: and what's more, he was Jewish. In Rome he was classified by the Department of Demography and Race as a 'dangerous Jew' — which got him arrested, as soon as the Duce had declared war, in June 1940. Now it was necessary to save the son. The horizon was blocked. But it would be a passing storm. Some trick ought to suffice. As the son of a Jewish father and an 'Aryan' mother, [I could be 'Aryan'.] 'He is not considered of Jewish

race who, being born of a mixed marriage, professes some religion other than the Jewish as from the date 1st October 1938-XVI', [said the Law.] If only I had had the tranquil opportunism, the healthy cynicism needed to conform to those provisions, [so cynical and stupid to reread today in the history books.] If I had known the history of forced conversions, or conversions of convenience, in centuries past. But no. All the terms of my culture exalted the 'seriousness' of the Spirit, of morality. [In self-defence, I dramatised the choices:] and for years now my relations with the protestants in Florence, and the Waldensians in particular, had been, without my being aware of it, the way out I had been seeking from my provincial, petty-bourgeois world to look towards the European grand bourgeoisie, past rather than present, whose founding fathers, Calvin and Cromwell, I was reading.

[I believed in God and in the divinity of Jesus Christ at an age at which my contemporaries were losing, if they had ever possessed, their Catholic faith. My belief took the exasperated guise of the 'theology of crisis', my authors were Kierkegaard and Karl Barth.]

I can recall the painful seriousness with which, in May 1939, I received the baptism which – back-dated by ten or twelve months – was supposed to rescue me. And my shame: not at apostasy but at hypocrisy. Throughout those months, the painstaking requests for an interview with the authorities of the Fascist University Groups, the interminable waiting rooms, heart beating and with a vain façade of dignity, the interventions solicited from people of influence or declarations from friends attesting my loyalty to the regime. But no way, the Fascists weren't that stupid; nobody renewed any cards for me. For two years, until, to free me, my call-up, [there was the void around me; to show me friendship,] to be seen with me in the streets of Florence, to come and call me, could discredit, cause fingers to point. 'Filthy anti-Fascist Jew!', [these words,] accompanied by a fist and the taste of blood on the teeth; and the fist was that of a Senior in the Militia, the brother of an acquaintance of mine whom I had 'led astray' with my Judaism; and mine the teeth – in a street in the centre of Florence, in the crowd, early November 1939, Italy not yet at war: these words were intended to fix me, identify me. Seven months later, with war declared, my father in the Murate prison, [a beautiful June morning,] the foolish pride of sitting at my degree ceremony in front of the professors of the Faculty of Letters, in a dark suit, with white shirt and tie. Now I realise that those years should have bound me to one [of the unities,] the nuclei, among which I lived, and first and foremost, because it was the most under attack, to that of the Jews; at least in the eyes of my father, who lived only

to listen to the drums of Radio London, feebly audible through his clandestine head-set. And instead I withdrew from everything. Not pride: desolation, internal calculation, abandonment. I withdrew from the faces, the eyes of the Jews – the mild and silent eyes of Attilio Momigliano, driven from the Chair of Italian literature, or those of Cesarino Cammeo, which he could hardly focus, dilated and interrogative (and he was to kill himself in the months of German victories). Of what in that period – from Autumn 1939 to July 1941 – was being carried out in Central Europe I knew nothing.

29

Pause



31 Medium shot. Cotoncello, Isle of Elba. Slight upward angle on Franco Fortini, now in left half profile, still sitting in his wicker chair, but now at the top of stair leading to the terrace of the Casa Catrin, to the left of the entrance door of the house, his right elbow leaning on the balustrade above the road; behind him to the right there is just the hill with Efisio Pisani's house at the top (the house of the Germans to the right of the road is hidden by the projecting angle of the house in front of which Fortini is sitting). (lens 12.5)

FRANCO FORTINI: It was late spring, [warm.] Stretched out on my parents' bed, weakened by fever, I could see beneath the sheet the shape of my swollen stomach. [I no longer had continuous pain but just searing, intermittent spasms.] The doctor left the room to talk to my family. [I heard what he was saying and when they came back, smiling encouragingly, I smiled back, lying.] I had to be operated on within the hour. The chances of saving me were slight. Then I asked them to call Pastor V. [It was an afternoon of silence and sunlight.] I heard him release the padlock on his bicycle downstairs; [he spoke to me,] asked for a cup with a little water, and baptised me. A little later [I heard a sound at the door and] in came the people from the Misericordia to carry me away on a stretcher, sweating under their black cloaks.

From here to 36 shots separated by brief stretches of clear leader

FRANCO FORTINI: I read [in a document] by a group of Christian theologians [a very firm] statement of position against the untenable pretension of identifying the Jews with the state of Israel, which they accused of racism, and against the short memory of Christians in Europe and America who, by helping the birth and development of the state of Israel, think thereby to wash their hands of guilt for persecution and indifference. And the political proposal of the document is for a pluralist state which would welcome back the refugees and give to all minorities equal civil rights and economic power.

The statement of position and the political proposals are of restricted interest to me. The religious interpretation, however, maintains that the creation of an exclusively Jewish state is as much contrary to the Scriptures, [and thus to God's plan,] as an exclusively Christian state. It would represent a regression to the medieval mentality which identifies State and Church. [At this point] the document does not fail to point out that to concentrate on a purely temporal human destiny is also proper to messianic Marxism.

It seems to me that to affirm the universalist vocation of the Jewish people it is not necessary to have recourse to the authority of the Scriptures. The Jews *have been* the 'figure' of that universalism, the 'witnesses of God among the nations'. And if then to be Jewish means a certain synthesis of behaviours, movements and situations, a certain destiny in a certain measure undergone and chosen, then several human communities can be this. The attribute 'Jew' is acquired and is lost, [is concentrated and dissolved.] As far as 'messianic Marxism' is concerned, I am aware that its identification/going beyond of State and Church (ie the Party) is its most tragic weakness [and that Marxism must be silent on that of which it cannot speak and degrades itself when it displays on this point, a sureness it cannot have.] When all its strength and its profoundest truth lies in demonstrating, with a fist or with a crippled stump, its own partiality.

FRANCO FORTINI: There remain the political and military affairs of the state of Israel and the Arab countries. That state was born by force and war, and force and war can maintain it or destroy it. I am convinced that the world as a whole can expect great benefits from the existence and development of the state of Israel. The greatest is probably [— and many people have said this —] that of its potential function of revolutionary mediation between the [so-called] West of liberal-Christian and socialist inheritance and the Third World, a function so far not fulfilled. Revolutionary mediation — in other words

expressed in a struggle for an end to national states, to private profit, and to exploitation, particularly neo-colonialist. I can see no other rights to national survival, or at least none that are different from the rights of any other national or ethnic group. One might add that for many countries, such as Belgium, Italy, Greece, Spain and so forth, national independence is little more than a juridical fiction. I am well aware that we are living through a revival of nationalisms, favoured by the struggles of the ex-colonial and under-developed countries which over the last half-century have combined national struggle and the struggle for socialism; [I am aware that these new nationalisms run the risk of attaching to themselves a racist element ('Asians', 'blacks')] and that nothing seems more absurd today than the proletarian internationalism of the Marxist tradition. Indeed the preachers of the Internationale of Western, or Christian, or 'social-democratic, or syncretist civilisation are precisely the apologists of the United States of America as superpower [(including, alongside the Israeli generals, also those of India and Indonesia) – usually, here, in the guise of UN internationalism.] But the only possibility of an *initial* victory of communism on a world scale still remains today subordinated to a capacity to co-ordinate internationally all those who are united by social antagonism to the general mechanism of exploitation. [Why else distinguish between an Israeli general and a North Vietnamese?]

34 As 31.

FRANCO FORTINI: The complexity of the real, the reading of it at an infinite number of levels, does not free anyone from an objective simplification, from the inscription of every life in an order of behaviours which are class behaviours; [meanwhile] subjective simplification, expressed in ideological terms, which I use, like everyone else [– interpretation, 'consciousness' destined to fail –] never [(or hardly ever)] pretends to be an instrument of scientific statement but is provocation, a reagent which leads others to state their own class identity.

Until the June war had been fought and won, to outsiders it could remain unclear just to what degree Israeli political leadership was committed to class policies, to loyalty to the imperialist cause. Unclear, that is, to those who had forgotten the war of 1956 and the violence of the reprisals which killed, on average, four Arabs for every Israeli.

35 As 31.

FRANCO FORTINI: To evoke the Nazi slaughter is to ask for a key to it, an interpretation.

The meaning was: to have resumed, [in the position of victim and] in an incredible concentration of time and ferocity, all

the forms of dominion and of the violence of man against man; to have reproduced for the span of a single generation everything which, diluted in time and in space, by habit and by insensibility, the European subordinate classes and the people of the colonies had undergone by way of denial of existence and of history, alienation, reification, annihilation.

[But] to extract this meaning and a lesson of struggle against the [extreme] conditions which, [as we have learnt,] make possible the destruction of man *and of which the Jewish massacre is only an example*, this is something few have achieved. Many spokesmen of Western so-called 'culture' have sought extra-historical and meta-political explanations, and rapidly came to situate the Nazi massacres in the order of the 'holy' and to consider them the work of Evil In Itself, which is basically to accept, though inverting the content, one of the central myths of the Nazi mystique: purity and purification through the holocaust. [This has been] an analogous operation, [at the international level,] to that carried out here to interpret Fascism. [In both cases] the Soviet, and Communist, position, to the extent that it tended towards co-existence (in other words, UN democratism) tended also to perpetuate, in agreement with Western ideological spokesmen, the propagandist-pathetic line about Horror and Bestiality. [Naturally a class interpretation has been advanced, and in forms that have become canonical; but its moralistic edge, with its underlying optimism, has continued until recently to encourage a 'fixation' of Nazism in mythological forms, which has played to the advantage of its atypical forms, and to those, equally ferocious, of modern imperialism. To dissolve this fixation and] to restore to the Nazi slaughter its character of blood-thirsty normality, it has been necessary for new countries to enter the struggle, countries in which European colonialism had set up camps much vaster than those of the Nazis and destroyed many more millions of human lives than the SS ever did.

And finally it must be said that, in the action of those who fought against Nazism with particular coherence and heroism and whose thoughts and last letters have been left for us to read, and also, and perhaps even more, in those who were in no way exceptional and have left no trace, [the action of those who were only victims, I have always felt] that [there was something that went beyond the struggle against Nazism, [something that – if only for a moment, the supreme one –] joined, whether they knew it or not, in the 'dream of something' that men have had 'for so long', the enormous dream of mankind.

are not different just because their past is different and determines them differently. They are not, they must not, they cannot be equal, and indeed they must be, and they are forced to be, different, because here and now their actions are different, because they occupy different places in the complex of historical forces, in the simultaneity of the world. [Their past has placed them where they are, but it is the future which makes them move.] And they are different in relation to you because, with their action in the present, they implicate *your* difference, *your* action. My closeness to you, your distance from me, are measured by what we both do, by how and where we do it, in the context of a confrontation, of a struggle both immediate and universal.



37 Medium shot. Florence, Piazza Mentana
(lens 17.5)

Fixed angle on the inscription at the base of the monument facing the Arno, which reads:

To the brave
who falling at Mentana
dedicated Rome
to a free Italy

The camera is facing the base, but a little to the right

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: Of the various things which in my memory of my father I would identify as unattractive or disagreeable or embarrassing – the anxiety, the volatility, the improvisation, the absence of interior pauses and the biological despair that this implies – all these things I find disagreeable, unattractive and embarrassing in myself; they can be reflected in a glimpse in a mirror or fixed in a snapshot.

I think he must have suffered, very young, at about twenty, [a severe and inhibiting setback,] when the financial ruin and suicide of a rich relative meant that he was no longer free to carry on the journalistic activity he had just started. Then, mid-way through his life, in 1925, with the climate of fear, the beatings up, the Fascist prosecution, [the certainty that his

economic weakness and his modest culture would not allow him the option of the more genteel anti-Fascism of the professors who supported Salvemini,] I think he must have undergone a further inhibition on his capacities as his modest hopes of professional success and well-being were shattered. World of childish pleasures, naïve delight at being in company with important [or prominent] people; pleasure in little celebrations, in the comfortable hotel, in going out to a show, as of someone who had behind him appearance and not being, [strained circumstances. After the parenthesis of the post-war years from 1918, when he received political friends in the *pensione* which was his home and where he lived with my mother and me, there followed] years and years of miserable furnished apartments, tiny holidays, threats from the landlord, periodic visits from the bailiffs to value the furniture of the dining room or bedroom, unpaid loans. [And a plausible, good-natured professional shrewdness: the mask of the lawyer of yesteryear.]

Onto me was transferred the ambition for social advancement, which he had inherited from his family together with the values of the poor Jew who has been able to escape from the rag trade and enter the professions, the values which throughout Europe were being defended by the children and grandchildren of those who had come out of the ghetto: intelligence as quickwittedness, progress as rationality, equality . . . It must have been my father who made me pause in front of that monument on the Lungarno . . .



Camera begins to pan towards the foot of the monument, where a triangle is visible carved in the stone:

. . . And later I noticed in the stone [of the base] the trace left by a [bronze] Masonic triangle which the Fascists had torn out.

38 Long shot. Florence, Piazza Mentana and Lungarno Generale Diaz. Horizontal pan right to left about 250°. It starts from the monument on the base of which a 'partisan' is brandishing a pistol (towards the Lungarno) and with his left hand holding up a

fallen comrade; it then crosses the Lungarno Diaz past the Chamber of Commerce, sweeps past the Ponte Vecchio and the hill on the other side of the river, returns by the Ponte alle Grazie to the Lungarno Diaz again (but now on the other side of Piazza Mentana, with the Hotel Balestri), and ends on the crossroads of Lungarno Diaz and the Ponte alle Grazie. The camera is at the height of the gas lamp at the end of the wall separating the narrow pavement of the Lungarno from the cobbled slope which goes down to the river opposite Piazza Mentana.

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: Once, [I seem to remember,] when a trial was being prepared against a group of Fascists who had contributed to the deportation of 341 Florentine Jews, of whom only seven returned from the camps, my father told me that to the appeal [made by the defence, of which he was a member,] for surviving relatives to come and give evidence, many, far too many, had not responded. 'There's a poor woman, a working woman, not Jewish, who used to live with M who was killed in Germany. She had nothing to hope for from the trial, but came forward spontaneously to give evidence in memory and out of affection for the dead man. But so many of our Jews here, who have had fathers and brothers deported, don't want to appear. It must be the old superstitious habit of not naming persecution for fear of bringing it back to life. And then there's the fact that before 1938 those people were on the best of terms with the authorities and Fascist leaders and the Fascist bourgeoisie. And whether or not they held Fascist opinions and Fascist party cards, the fact is they got on well with them, they frequented the same circles, [they played cards together,] they had shared tastes and the same life because they were of the same class. And now they're back frequenting each other again, and lots of others – and ten years haven't even passed – are trying to forget because remembering too much might have political overtones, which those now in power wouldn't like.'

Thus far, I think, and no further did his consciousness ever reach. He finished his speech at one of those trials with [the ritual prayer]: 'Hear, oh Israel, the Eternal is our God, the Eternal is One'. He had no other gesture of faith or ceremony [though perhaps inside himself he kept an amulet from childhood. But he never really wanted to know anything; there was just his convulsive manner, panic-stricken and infantile, of taking flight before the shadow of Sheol.] I recall how anxiety strangled [and twisted] his voice as he called out if ever he lost me from sight in a crowd when I was a boy, [or if, even when I was grown up, he had to call me in the street;] it was an anxiety of bewilderment and anguish, a voice which I blushed to hear [in public] as I tried to display [my own self-control] and a lordly calm which I could never attain.

Recalling this I seem to understand that this calling out a name from terror, this mad cry for help, was a link joining him and me along age-old threads of nerve cells consumed over generations of humiliation and fear [and, for me still, the cry of the wounded.]

39 *Big close-up. Fixed angle on the following text, written by Franco Fortini in his own handwriting in red ink on white paper:*

To discipline mimicry, to exhibit –
[held still in its formal death –]
the stamp of ancient subjection,
and at the same time to imitate
the violence and lament of violence
undergone. This, I think, I have sought
to do in my verse, and this
is connected somehow with Judaism.

Silence

40 *Big close-up of text from PCI daily, L'Unità.*

VOICE OF FRANCO FORTINI: It has to happen in spite of everything that *Unità*, in the midst of its clumsy stupidities, [some just technical. some merely journalistic,] and in spite of its permanent defence of a politics of coexistence, of Nasser and his generals, of Paul VI and his encyclicals, nevertheless [after a few days] printed something that was more true, and more 'just' – also because more desperate – than all the rest of the Italian press.

The text unfolds on a rostrum camera, column by column, as follows:

(A) [When, during Hitler's invasion and aggression of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, the SS made their choice of those prisoners who were to be massacred, the phrase shouted out by the interpreters, translated from German, was always the same, 'Jews and Communists, step forward.' Then the sound of machine-gun fire and explosions rang out, as at Baby Yar. Jews and Communists, Communists and Jews. How many of the people who landed in the hands of the SS during the second world war nevertheless took refuge behind the fact of being neither 'Jewish' nor 'Communist' ?]

But in Paris two days ago – even if one abstracts from what is at stake in the world today, even if one is prepared to attribute to the waving of a flag with a six-pointed star yet another cry of grief and anguish – it would still not have been in any way possible to recognise in that cry the ancient accents of grief and invocation of the just cause. [The cries of the demonstrators,] frenzied, wild-eyed, threatening, [were far dif-

ferent:] they were not cries in favour of the Jewish people, but against the Arab people. And the only slogan articulated and endorsed was the same as at the most lurid period of the [lurid] Algerian war with the [car] hooters beating out: 'Algérie française, Algérie française!' A macabre [and shameful] slogan [which is certainly not that of the French government or that of the majority of responsible political forces in the French Republic,] but none the less emerged irresistibly from the very bowels of French [nationalism,] racism and imperialism, stirred up by the ignoble identification of the moral reparations which the Jewish people still expects from Europe with the *raison d'état* of the State of Israel.

- (B) [There is no need to look any further to understand – and we repeat – that what at this moment has united the Arabs as such is their refusal to be any longer the objects of a history written on their skin in the capitals of Europe.] They have discovered themselves as Arabs because the whole history of imperialism over the last fifty years has denied them as such, making and unmaking frontiers, dismembering and uniting states, shoring up and undermining different regimes according to the state of play of the rivalries and interest of the various imperialist powers. And when the people have asked for freedom and independence the only response has been shooting and killing, [as is still happening in Aden.]

And if occasionally a primitive nationalism has been the only mainspring of this struggle, [we would not refer to the question (though it will be raised) of the meaning of nationalism in countries like France, Italy and Britain and the meaning that it has in a country that has to fight against foreign domination, whether direct or indirect.] We would only like to remind those who turn up their noses at such an 'elementary' level of consciousness, that it is the child of an oppression that knows no bounds, an oppression compounded of illiteracy, poverty and hunger, of piles of corpses and rows of villages razed to the ground, the other face of the modern pipelines or cotton mills of a highly 'civilised' Western capitalist bourgeoisie.

[And we would say more.] If sometimes, [as is happening,] there emerges an element of religious fanaticism, [we would not refer to studies of the historical and human mutilation that imperialism imposes on colonised peoples as a result of which even fanaticism can become a 'defence-value'.] We would recall, [more simply, that] the only 'holy wars' conducted by the Arabs against the Jews of Palestine, were paid for, willed and imposed by democratic England, which ignited religious hatred, [raised to a level of fanaticism,] and diverted the nationalist wave onto Palestine with the sole aim of controlling the balance [of power in the Middle East.] In 1921 it

had the Jewish communities of Palestine attacked by its vassal Ahmed Bey; in 1934-36 by Fawzi el-Kawuki, under the direct orders of Glubb Pasha. All this leaves its trace.

| ARABI ED | | 19 AD OGGI | |
|----------|---------|------------|-----------|
| 1919 | | 1961 | |
| Arabi | 660.000 | | 280.000 |
| Ebrei | 56.000 | | 2.155.551 |

(C) *The camera pans across a diagram showing the relative population of Jews and Arabs in Palestine, before reverting to the columns of text.*

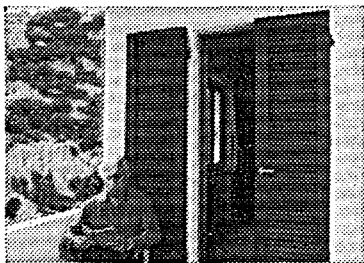
(D) The true story of American penetration in the Middle East, its relations with Israel and the Arab world, against the background of its attempts to replace the British, [probably] remains to be written. [But about one thing there can be no doubt.] Faced with the overwhelming Israeli victory over the British vassal regimes, and the severe shock this gave to the general imperialist equilibrium, American 'good offices', intended to preserve the balance, became a focal point for everyone, including the Israeli bourgeoisie – at the expense first of all of the Arab peoples [but also] of the Jewish people too, and at the cost of a permanent state of tension. The American solution, based on an equivocal armistice which offered no stable peace, gave to the Americans the official role of a Power in the Middle East and the chance to set themselves up as arbiters of the tension, protectors of Israel but also of the feudal regimes. Britain accepted this because it ultimately did rescue some of her friendly vassals. The feudal regimes were grateful because, so long as tension remained active, they had a diversion onto which to redirect the increasing internal turbulence. The Israeli bourgeoisie, finally, saw in it an instrument with which to put an end to the anti-colonialist element which was emerging from the anti-British struggle, and [a way] to strengthen the Zionist character of the State.

The 1950 declaration of the three Great Powers, USA, Britain and France, [which was received with enthusiasm by Israel and the Arab feudal regimes] symbolises the coincidence of the various interests. [We should recall] that this declaration was based on the principle that 'the Arab states and the state of Israel all have a need to maintain a certain level of armaments in order to guarantee their security and legitimate

From then on the dislocation of Israel in the Middle East is characterised by the defence of the precarious imperialist equilibrium in the area and therefore by a clear opposition to any threat to this equilibrium brought about the Arab liberation movement. This line, [be it noted] was not simply a matter of playing the American or British game, but [also] had its reasons [in the logic] of the internal development of Israeli society; [as a result there are present in its evolution the normal contradictions which distinguish relations between capitalist states.]

- (E) In the course of this development a social problematic within Israel becomes [clearly] delineated, with the first class-confrontations. The tension with the Arab world, continuous and intentional, was no longer capable of containing the real problems which were beginning to emerge. [And it was again in the course of this development that] the bourgeoisie responded to those problems with the idea of the 'strong State', in which the military began to take up key posts in the administration and in the economy and 'exceptional' security laws were promulgated, including a law limiting the right to strike, [which was presented last October.] The phrase 'armed ghetto', [coined by an Israeli politician,] became more and more the bourgeois line. Except that Israel was no longer a ghetto, far from it.

The crisis has reached its most acute point in the last few months. Production has fallen from an annual rate of increase of 10 per cent to 1.6 per cent. Forty per cent of the building industry is idle. Bank crashes have become frequent. Wages have been frozen, while prices have rocketed. Unemployment is up from 35,000 in 1965 to 100,000, [in other words 10 per cent of the labour force. And it could go up further, since] the bourgeoisie and the government responded to the crisis like any other capitalist bourgeoisie: elimination of the worst hit firms and monopolistic concentration; state aid to export industries and a squeeze on popular consumption. For the last year Israel has seen the spread of strikes and social struggles, independently and against the will of the Histadrut.



- 40 41 Medium-close and long shot. Cotoncello, Isle of Elba. Pan, as level as possible, from left to right of about 300°, starting from Fortini, still seated as in shots 31 to 36, but now facing more towards camera and with only his head in view in the lower half of the frame, and with only the wall of the house behind him, not the hill. The movement leaves the house and the terrace to reach the sea and finally the hill shown in shots 31-36.
(lens 9)

FRANCO FORTINI: If the word revolution had not been made almost ridiculous through abuse, one would have to say that revolutionary action today has to be even more reformist than the reformist; apparently myopic, dedicated to small but sure operations, to making diamonds or deadly artificial flints, to minute sabotage, to patient but total destruction. To attract the occasional bark or the occasional bite is a matter truly of no importance, with no merit or demerit. It is necessary to wish something very different, and above all to believe, with Lenin, that for every situation there exists *one* way out and the possibility of finding it. Or in other words that truth exists, absolute in its relativity.



Credits (white on black):

ECLAIR COUTANT Renato Berta, Emilio Bestetti

NAGRA Jeti Grigioni

ASSISTANTS Leo Mingrone, Gabriele Soncini, Gregory Woods,
Bernard Mangiante

PRODUCTION Straub-Huillet

FINANCE Andi Engel, Artificial Eye, Dan Talbot, New Yorker
Films, Stéphane Tchalgadjeff, Sunchild, Institut de l'Audio-
visuel, Radiotelevisione Italiana, Seconda Rete

ENGLISH TITLES by Gregory Woods and Misha Donat

Translated by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith

Historical Fiction A Body Too Much

Jean-Louis Comolli*

'What, in the last analysis, was the meaning of the Trojan War and similar tragic atrocities? There can be no doubt that they were intended as *festivals* for the gods. . . . Ancient humanity, an essentially public and visual world, unable to conceive of happiness without spectacles and feasts, was full of tender regard for the "spectator". And as we have said before, *punishment* too has its festive features.'

Nietzsche: *The Genealogy of Morals*** , Second Essay, VII

What is to be made, in films, of fictional effects?¹ How and on what basis do cinematic fictions work? What is in play, what tricks, in the conjunction of the machine of Fiction and the machine of Representation? I should like to approach these questions through a special type of fiction, historical fiction.²

* Originally published as 'Un corps en trop' *Cahiers du Cinéma* July 1977 n 278

** *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Francis Golffing, Doubleday, Garden City NY, 1956, pp 202-3

1 See 'Le Passé filmé' *Cahiers du Cinéma* n 277, the introduction to a series of articles of which this is the first.

2 There are other, more conjunctural reasons for this choice of historical fiction. First, the current revival of the genre, for better (Allio) or worse (Cassenti, Féret). Also the work carried out at the 'Cinéma et Histoire' seminars at Valence, to which I shall return at the end of the series. More precisely, on the fringe of 'Cinéma et Histoire', a course organised by the Valence ciné-club for a number of FFCC [*Fédération Française des Ciné-Clubs*] animateurs, at which, with the theme 'representation of history', we analysed three exemplary historical fictions, *The New Babylon*, *Young Mr Lincoln* and, of course, *La Marseillaise*. Hence it is on the basis of what was said during this course that the present text has been worked out. Finally, a more direct motive, at this moment Gérard Guicheteau, Serge Toubiana and I are working on the outline of a film on the Paris Commune.

42 Why? There is no 'historical film' that is not fiction first: how indeed could the past be filmed live? Nor any that, however serious its documentation, does not fictionalise the most referenced historical argument. However, even in the case of a work of phantasy, this inevitable putting into fiction comes to a stop at one or other of the limits of the historically referential: a minimum of information, a minimum of historical knowledge have to be provided; and a minimum of period effects have to be produced too.

It is my hypothesis that the cinematic representation of History defies Fiction although it holds only through it. In such a paradoxical situation, both required and prevented, irresistible and imprisoned, historical fiction becomes a kind of analyser which pushes to their most revealing limit the conditions of exercise and stakes at play in all cinematic fiction. If one of the great questions of the cinema, founding and launching the fictional mechanism, is *how does one believe in it?*,³ with historical fictions one has to believe in it with additional difficulties, against more obstacles, and above all to believe in it despite what might seem to rationalise that belief, despite even the indices of truth and the referential proofs which are used to replace the game of belief by an order of knowledge.

I

Filming a fiction, staging it, mounting it in the field of a look, begins by assigning to characters, those of the script, physical trajectories through concrete locations (speech too being a trajectory). To this end these imaginary characters have to be endowed with bodies, faces, looks and voices. Bodies which are quite real, since they are those of the actors: the ones we see. The body filmed is not an imaginary body, even if the fiction refers it to some purely invented character and whatever the phantasies for which it is the support.

It is not imaginary to the extent that we see its image and know, as soon as we are in the spectator's place, that a real body, the actor's, is required for there to be an image of a body. The body of the imaginary character is the image of the real body of the actor. This body caught in our look appears to us as an attribute of the character? I do not think so. I know this is what the notion and practice of *typage* would like to convince us of. But it seems that things happen otherwise than Eisenstein's lectures tell us (I am not talking about his films, in which, as Barthes has emphasised,³ the consistency of the denotation and connotation of the bodies is fairly weak) and otherwise than in the *class norma-*

3 Cf 'The third meaning' in *Image-Music-Text* selected and translated by Stephen Heath, Fontana, London 1977

I think rather that it is the character who, being filmable only by proxy, via an interposed actor, has for us the value of an attribute of the actor's body. The character reaches us as a bodily effect in the image. He may have been long worked over, defined, constituted in a script, but it is not the order of investigation but the order of exposition that is enounced in a film: first to appear will be the body, the body as an *empty mask*, and the character will only appear later and bit by bit as effects of this mask, effects in the plural, changing, unstable, never quite achieved, thwarted, incomplete.

If the *mise-en-scène* of a fiction is thus the attribution to real bodies of imaginary characters, things are slightly more complicated with historical fictions: all the characters in them are not phantastic; often they presuppose a referential model; or they have one and must make the best of it; when they do not use this model as surety, only entering the film as representatives of the historical referent, having no other diegetic consistency than to guarantee, by a rapid and not unobtrusive appearance, by a presence often no more than photographic, that this is the serious realm of History, real History. In short, most of these characters have played, or are supposed to have played, their parts, big or small, on the stage of History before they came to rest on that of the film. These characters have a past, they have a history before the film began and without needing it: other scriptwriters, the historians, have dealt with them.

II

The actor Ardisson, in Renoir's *La Marseillaise*, plays the character Jean-Joseph Bomier, a figure from the lower classes of Marseilles, enthusiastic and scatter-brained, 'spontaneously anarchist', hence the stake and the main target for the propagandist efforts of the

4 Remember the advertising campaign run by the ineffable Stoléru for the 'revalorisation of manual labour' and those images of happy workers stuck up at every street corner as a result. Typage was going in it at full blast and, as usual in advertisements, it was used both as a labelling system and as a norm. Note incidentally the care, the precision, one might almost say the rigour, the advertisers devoted to the composition of their 'cast': the human types represented had to be at once immediately identifiable, cataloguable and sufficiently normalised to induce, starting from that flawless identity, a no less full *identification*. Advertising, and I shall return to this, is the present-day culmination of the system of typage recommended by Eisenstein and the Soviet cinema of the 1920s and illustrated after them and *against them* by the films of 'socialist realism'. [Editorial note: Stoléru was a special minister for the encouragement of manual work destined to give it social 'status' and 'acceptability'.]

44 organised militant Arnaud (Andre).⁵ Like everything we finally come to know about this character, we learn this only from the development of the fiction. All we can know about him is what the film tells us. Perhaps Bomier existed, perhaps there was a 'real' Bomier, but that does not matter, for us he only exists in the film, there are no other traces of him than those left by Ardisson's body in Renoir's images. For us, Bomier is a fictional character who, despite his role in a 'historical film', has all the properties of an imaginary character.

In the same film, Louis XVI is Pierre Renoir. But there could hardly be a less imaginary character than Louis XVI: historical, the name was borne by a body (even a sacred body), and the image of this body has come down to us, not in one but in many films, and before the films in numerous portraits. Ardisson, for as long as the film lasts, lends his body to a fictional name, a bodiless name. Pierre Renoir can only confront his body with the supposed (and supposedly familiar) body of Louis XVI: interference, even rivalry between the body of the actor and that other body, the 'real' one, whose (historical) disappearance has left traces in images other than cinematic ones which have to be taken into account.

If the imaginary person, even in a historical fiction, has no other body than that of the actor playing him, the historical character, filmed, has at least two bodies, that of the imagery and that of the actor who represents him for us. There are at least two bodies in competition, one body too much. And if for us Ardisson is unimpeachably the Marseillais Bomier, whom we cannot see in any other way, whose image we can compare with no other, only refer it to itself as the film imposes it, there will on the contrary always be some doubt as to the pertinence of Pierre Renoir to Louis XVI.

Ardisson's task is, so to speak, simple: Bomier can only be him. Of course it is also necessary that Bomier be, for initially he is nothing, he is only Ardisson so long as Ardisson does not produce the effects that constitute Bomier. But these effects will all go to Bomier's credit. Without any reservations, without the slightest doubt, even if they are contradictory and sometimes excessive: Bomier is not a character all of a piece and in particular he is a character who has to change lines under Arnaud's influence. For this change to be manifest and convince the spectator more effectively, Bomier will be led, over his dead body (he too denies), to positions he had earlier condemned: he will come to appreciate

5 Remember the date, 1937, and the circumstances of this film: the wave of enthusiasm for the Popular Front and rise of the *national* theme in left-wing discourse. As if in echo to the praise of the 'Marseillaise' pronounced by Maurice Thorez in 1936, the film co-operative and the CGT launched the film project and tried to finance it by a national subscription.

the words of the 'Marseillaise' which he had condemned as appallingly bombastic,⁶ or claim to be a supporter of the delegation of power he had constantly stormed against. Which, be it said in parenthesis, enables Renoir, by an accumulation of contrasting effects and a whole play of ruptures, to dispense with the fatal moment of 'attaining consciousness' which so encumbered *La Vie est à Nous*.

So Ardisson's facial contortions, his omni-directional impulsiveness, his overacting in mimicry, gesture and voice, all contribute to a split character, full of holes and residues, but the character is there for all that: such can only be Bomier, with self-evident authority. Even inconsistent, the character is consistent with the actor. And nothing can disturb this consistency, either from within the fiction (which adopts the character's inconsistency, plays on it to make it acceptable) or from outside the film: in the name of what could we doubt this representation of Bomier?

III

No doubts? And yet here too we know that Ardisson is not Bomier. But this indisputable certainty which places every spectator in the position of nobody's fool from the moment the film begins is quite unproductive for us: it remains of the order of a frozen, fixed, unadventurous knowledge (we know, but how much rather would we not know . . .). Of itself, it is incapable of gaining us the slightest pleasure, and we accept it as the inevitable precondition for the spectacle to be possible at all (there have to be actors, machines, theatres, etc), the condition that every spectator knows and immediately recognises its nature as simulacrum, is perfectly aware of and necessarily accepts the break and the distance between him or her and the scene. We experience this knowledge and certainty with a certain fatalism (it has to be . . .), I would go so far as to say with boredom: we are in the position of those impatient gamblers who know the rules of the game and who one asks to remember those rules before playing: quick, the game is beginning!

This boring knowledge has to be lost as soon as possible and these rules played. The certainty we always have, bearing it in mind, that the spectacle is not life nor the film reality, that the actor is not the character and that if we are there as spectators it is because we know it is a simulacrum,⁷ is a certainty we have

6 His words: 'There is something wild and bombastic in this song which I do not like.'

7 The spectacle, and the cinema itself, despite all the *reality effects* they may produce, always offer themselves to spectators *for what they are*. There are no spectators *unaverted* to the spectacle, even if they allow themselves (temporarily) to be caught by the fictioning machine and fascinated by the simulacrum: that is exactly *why* they went.

46 to be able to doubt. Its only value is that it is put at risk: it only interests us if it can (temporarily) be abolished. The 'I know very well' irresistibly calls for the 'but all the same', includes it as its value, its intensity. The one is inseparable from the other, is valueless without the other. We know, but we want something else: to believe. We want to be fooled, without ever quite ceasing to know that we are. We want both, both to be fools and nobody's fools, to oscillate, swing from knowledge to belief, from distance to adhesion, from criticism to fascination.

And in fact we never forget that Pierre Renoir is not Louis XVI, that Ardisson is not Bomier. But at the same time we believe that they are. If at least the actor and the film play them sufficiently *with us*. The spectacle is always a *game*. It requires the participation of the spectators not as consumers but as players, accomplices, masters of the game, even, if they are also its stakes. The simulacrum does not fool a 'passive' spectator (there are no 'passive spectators'); the spectator has to participate in his own fooling; the simulacrum is the *means* whereby he is helped to fool himself. The spectator, never 'passive', works: but his work, contrary to current orthodoxy, is not just decoding, reading, elaboration of signs and mobilisation of knowledge. First of all and just as much, if not more, it is to play the game, to fool himself for pleasure and despite this knowledge that strengthens his position as nobody's fool, to maintain, if the spectacle, the game, will allow, the mechanism of denegation at its regime of highest intensity. The more one knows the more difficult it is to believe and the more it is worth managing to do so.

That is why we enjoy the performances of Ardisson and Pierre Renoir in different ways. Ardisson is not Bomier? We agree and at the same time are quite happy for him to be so. Nothing prevents us giving him the benefit of our complicity: now it's his turn to play. He must convince us of what we know to be untrue but ask only to believe so that the game can begin and go on (the game stops, even if the spectacle does not, when we no longer believe). Between him and us the game is simple and, so to speak, without handicaps: at the outset we grant that the actor may be Bomier because for us Bomier can only be this actor. It is up to him to do the rest, to fulfil his part of the bargain and, with the help of fiction and *mise-en-scène*, progressively (even if jerkily) construct the character, fortifying the initial supposition of identity more and more. What happens then works less unequivocally in the mode of denegation, more in that of confirmation. Or rather, the denegatory formula is reversed and becomes: 'I know very well you are Bomier – but all the same, what an actor Ardisson is!' A new knowledge is constituted against the background of the first, denegated, no doubt too easily denegated, knowledge. And this new knowledge both satisfies us – the bargain is well fulfilled – and disappoints us a little: it does not raise the stakes, it turns

on itself in a loop of confirmation, each thing in its place, the body with the character and the actor with the performance. 47

There is the risk of a loss of tension, a regime of lesser pleasure, if the character is taken as given, regarded as so automatic that all there is left to enjoy is the actor's talent: lack of interest in the character, decathexis from the fiction. This is what would happen in *La Marseillaise*, too, if Bomier was not built precisely out of inconsistencies and infringements of the code, in a *belying* figure. In the first stages of the fiction we learn to divine the character (the mask is only gradually filled in) and as everything is done to make him predictable for us we finally come to know him almost too well: a lapse into the overcoded. But, just as our predictions become so certain that they no longer interest us, he belies them. He is no longer where we expected him, and the more marked he has been, the more he unmarks himself: new bet, higher stakes, the fictional energy is set going again, and it is this that enables us to believe (again) in this quite incredible disavowal of Bomier.

Pierre Renoir, it is clear, faces a far more taxing bargain. We really do know that he is not Louis XVI and never quite will be. Something undecidable floats around him, a blur in the image, a duplication: there is a ghost in this body. At any rate there is some historical knowledge, some referent constituting a screen for the image and preventing the actor and the *mise-en-scène* from playing on self-evidence (it can only be me) or assertion (it is me!).

The mechanism has to be more devious, not so much to struggle against this disturbing effect as rather to use it and play on it: this will proceed from the double affirmation (it's him and it's me) which realises the always improbable conjunction of two identities, two bodies which exclude one another while coinciding. No fit between character and actor,⁸ or one that is fleeting, lightning-like, immediately destroyed by a return of the discrepancy between body acting and body acted. Pierre Renoir's Louis XVI never quite comes off, it can only be at the limit, and that is why despite

8 As André Bazin notes, 'miscasting' is almost a rule in Renoir's films: 'None of the major actors in *The Rules of the Game* is in his element (with the exception of Gaston Modot and Paulette Goddard). And who would claim that the cast of *The Lower Depths* stepped from the Gorkii play? Gabin as a hero in a Russian novel is a long shot at best; and it would be difficult to conceive of a more spectacular bit of miscasting than Valentine Tessier in *Madame Bovary*' (Jean Renoir, ed François Truffaut, trans W W Halsey II and William H Simon, Delta Books, New York 1973, p 74). Or again, about *The Human Beast*: 'Renoir founds [his justification of the characters] not on psychology but on a metaphysics of actors. What we see on the screen is not the murderous rage of Lantier, but that of Jean Gabin. Even when the actor does not correspond physically or morally to the character in the book, the "error" of casting offers more advantages than disadvantages, because the presence of the actor, his powers of suggestion, are clearly superior to what is in the book' (ibid p 69).

48 everything we can believe in it because it is worked out *starting from this 'despite'* as well: the difficulty of the playing is represented in the game itself.

As a result we are summoned to the delicate exercise of a double game: it is him and it is not, always and at the same time; we believe in it and we do not, at the same time. Neither of the terms ever really prevails over the other, each keeps the other as a ground against which it stands out, each bounces off the trampoline of the other. They are held together for us by this oscillating movement, by the to-and-fro which makes us pass from one to the other without ever abandoning either. And this game of proximity and distance, of complicity and criticism,⁹ to which we are thus introduced, far from leaving us in an unsatisfied reserve or leading us to detachment, fuels and reignites our desire to believe (all the same) better than would any fit between actor and character, any self-evidence, any well-furnished credibility. For now the denegation is working at full throttle, neither of the two contradictory propositions that constitute it making an end of the other and each, even, improving on the other. The moment Pierre Renoir, by acting whose springs I shall analyse later, manages what is not easy, to make us believe he is Louis XVI, while not preventing us from continuing to think that he is not, a dynamic of increasing intensity is set up. The more he is him, the more difficult it is to believe it: the more we believe in it, the more we know all the same that he is not him, and the more we believe in it all the same. The pleasure here is not without its unease, it derives from the unease that reignites it.

All cinematic fictions are stretched more or less tightly by this knot of denegation.¹⁰ But historical fiction (at least its masterpiece, *La Marseillaise*) takes things further, and brings into play a movement of denegation to infinity. The coded is more visible, the supposedly known more awkward, the belief more problematic: there is *more to denegate*, a body and a knowledge too much. The irrational leap that marks the spectator's every entry into fiction, and whose gain of pleasure the latter risks quickly exhausting if it does not organise its repetition and amplification, is more difficult, more dangerous, in the case of historical fiction, since the belief and denial on which it is based are barred at every moment by the discourses of reason and have to prevail despite them, in an outburst of even greater irrationality.

9 See the beginning of section III above. The next article in this series will deal in more detail with the mechanism of this play and how it differs from both of the usual, and usually counterposed, schemata of 'identification' and 'distanciation'.

10 Which is active in a film at more levels than that of fiction alone. For example, that of the 'impression of reality' whose artificial character is never quite forgotten.

Only one body, in our example, can be 'too much': the one whose image we see, the body of Pierre Renoir, which belies as much as it figures that of Louis XVI. How can one play with a body too much? With one's own body too much? Why, by making this surplus visible, by disturbing the spectator's look with a bodily supplement, in other words by playing the most difficult game, by doing the opposite of what happens (today still) in most 'historical films'.

The latter usually try to ensure that the actor's body is forgotten, to cancel it, to keep it hidden, at least, beneath the supposedly known and intended pre-eminent body of the historical character to be represented. This is done by banking on the (necessarily blurred) memory the spectator has of that historical body and imagining that therefore all that needs to be done is to cobble together a resemblance (vague and inaccurate like all resemblance), or to force the inadequate physique of the actor with make-up (which will always be denoted as such: it is the nature of make-up to be visible), for the image of the historical body present in the spectator's memory to allow identification between the character and the actor's body (it really is him!) and for that image having thus performed this service to be entirely consumed in the soldering of copy and model.

No question in *La Marseillaise* of attempting to obliterate the memory image. On the contrary, its persistence is allowed to float, it is played on as a kind of embarrassment, a screen, a rival for the current image. As if it were necessary that it could survive throughout the struggle unleashed against it by the image of the actor's body for that struggle really to take place. But for this to be true, the body too much, retained in the act of its repudiation, must not remain in the state of a memory trace: otherwise the image of the film could prevail over the image from memory. It must also be inscribed in the actuality of the vision, it must be manifest and come back from the screen into the spectator's look. In fact this can only be done if it is supported and carried by the only body visible at that moment, the actor's.

Pierre Renoir is not content not to conceal his own body behind the supposed body of Louis XVI, not to apply it to the supposedly known model. He brings this body, his own, to the fore: he emphasises its reality and presence, multiplies its effects. Far from making the spectator forget it, he points it out to him: henceforth this body will not be something automatic. It begins to count, to weigh. The self-evidence of the image of a body as a result of which it is seen without being seen, the apparent naturalness, the familiarity of the body are thwarted here: Pierre Renoir plays his body as a problematic, paradoxical, body, strange to itself. (I note, in parenthesis, that all this is not just a matter of acting and the actor's technique: neither reaches us except doubly inscribed

50 in the dispositions of the fiction and the frames of the mise-en-scène; hence as effects.)

How is this body made too present? How is it made, not just sufficiently visible to escape the normal fate of most filmed bodies, insignificant, accessory, on the edge of non-visibility, but also so unby-passable, unforgettable? By making it the very centre and object of the scene, by displaying it in all its states. In all the sequences in *La Marseillaise* in which Pierre Renoir plays Louis XVI it is the royal body itself that is questioned, in question. Fiction and mise-en-scène, far from seeking to avoid this problematic body, to minimise it by decentring it, by filming it in ceremonies and amidst crowds, appearing along with others, take the opposite course and make this body the major preoccupation both of the character and of those surrounding him. It is dressed, powdered, fed; it is also venerated (or not); it is taken for walks, protected, hidden. . . . Valets, aristocrats, soldiers are at its service. Jean Renoir is not trying to trick either History or the spectator: he takes seriously the central place of the Body of the King in the monarchic system, he marks its devalorisation at the moment of the Revolution, he spares no avatar of the royal but devalued body of Louis XVI, in the end he takes the wager of his representation to its ultimate limits.

The first time we see it, in the scene of the *lever du Roi*, the royal body seems to us both caught up in, and prisoner to, the ritual mise-en-scène of the Court, which mediates its approach with a whole series of relays; and somewhat astray, not quite in the right place, already a little too much. Of course, the alienation effect produced by this lies in the contrast between the solemnity of the approach and the prosaic character of this body in night cap and gown. It lies perhaps above all in the discovery that this so carefully guarded body is nothing but the body of the actor, without make-up and as it were naked, deprived of the artifices of resemblance as much as the character it is supposed to embody is of the marks of royalty. Thus from the start we are made to feel quite sharply that on the one hand it is the body of Pierre Renoir that will command the scene, but on the other that the royal body has seen its best days and will have trouble holding its place. This impression is immediately strengthened: this body is dependent on the influence or assistance of other bodies subordinate to it, it is awkward, clumsy, incapable of autonomy; both futile and gross, childlike and graceless; no authority emanates from it, no confidence; in short, it is a body visibly ill at ease wherever it is (except at table), almost always embarrassed and seemingly embarrassing its supposed master first of all. Pierre Renoir brings off the coup of making this work with and in his own body (which certainly does not embarrass him so much), of, as it were, figuring a body in its own despite, discrepant, displaced, always somewhere in between actor and character. The maintenance of such an uncertainty

as to the identity of the body of the actor with that of the character raises the stakes in the fictional game, as we have seen; and this embarrassment which threatens to block the fiction can, as is the case here, be fictionalised in its turn: we thus discover, through emotion¹¹ as much as information, that Louis XVI is at ease neither in his body nor in his role.

The scene which epitomises all these surpluses and deficiencies, the paradoxes of the royal body, is the one in which, before the battle for the Tuileries Palace, Louis XVI unenthusiastically agrees to review the troops defending him. Hardly has his valet finished dressing him for this exhibition, which is by no means to his taste, than we see him caught in a certain embarrassment: his wig has slipped and is on askew. With some irritation he has it adjusted and at last advances into the throng of brilliant nobles of the Court, who, not ungrotesquely, go down on one knee and, their swords drawn, sing a fashionable royalist song ('*Oh Richard, oh mon Roi!*'). Louis XVI stares at them, dumbfounded; he does not know what expression to put on or what to say; distraction captures this heavy body and it becomes almost obscene juxtaposed to these elegant chevaliers. He goes on. The cries of '*Vive le Roi!*', mechanically repeated by Grenadiers and Swiss Guards only draw a half-smile from him, particularly since his wig is still troubling him. Lower down, in the courtyard, the battalions of the National Guard, royalists and others. First there are acclamations, more spontaneous than those of the mercenaries: he is now almost reassured; the people recognise him and are cheering him. He wants to go on despite attempts to dissuade him: the remaining companies to be reviewed, the ones who have been put in the front line, are the least certain. And their welcome is indeed an attack: they shout to his face '*Vive la Nation!*' Once again the royal body collapses; we see his face disintegrate; he stops, arms dangling, unable either to respond with contemptuous silence or to order a punishment; he guiltily lowers his head, his wig goes awry again and he adjusts it mechanically. He is pulled away and brought into safety. He rapidly disappears from the scene which shifts to a confrontation between two officers, one of whom wants to punish the insult to the King while the other prevents him with the most peremptory firmness. Thus the displacement and repetition of the conflict in a minor scene no more penalises the outrage on the King's person which remains unpunished: not only does the royal body no longer embody power, already there is no royal power left at all.

'An admirable touch', notes André Bazin,¹² in passing, 'Louis

11 For this impossible body moves us, moves us because of all the difficult and painful things the *mise-en-scène* makes it suffer. The 'warm sympathy' for his characters usually attributed to Renoir here shows its true colours: quite the opposite of kindness or any kind of softness or pity.

12 *Jean Renoir* op cit p 67

52 XVI is hindered by the fact that his wig is askew': admirable, indeed, for the sudden effect of condensation it produces. The wig here functions both as metaphor: it is in the place of the crown which is also slipping from the King's head; and as metonymy: it is this part which first detaches itself from the disintegrating royal body. Never has this body stopped falling apart as it was constructed before our eyes. It is no longer in any way sacred for its subjects who dare to hold themselves up in its presence and as if equal to it (*La Marseillaise* could also be summarised as the path taken by the body of the people to reach power and to overthrow it, as the body of the people rising and breaking like a wave, before being taken in hand by new masters and, finally, regimented: the march on Valmy). It is an encumbrance to its last supporters, quite happy to be rid of it through the intercession of the big bourgeoisie (Roederer, all in black and revolutionary titles, spiriting the royal body away and at the same time conducting its retreat like a funeral). It is unbearable even to its closest and most faithful friends, distraught at its constant inadequacy for its role. Finally it embarrasses the King himself. In short, this body is decidedly too much, and eventually it is too much *for us* too.

Hence when the accumulation of embarrassing effects by the fiction and by the actor's playing make this body more and more unbearable for us, too, today's spectators, and we catch ourselves relieved at its setting aside, that is the moment when we have *really* believed in Louis XVI in this film. Yet all we have seen is Pierre Renoir's body and we have never, in all the time it has been present in the image, been able to believe that this body could quite have been that of Louis XVI. And the moment this body has become, so to speak, so much too much that it has to disappear, we believe in it as we have never believed in it before. . . . By inscribing it in the private and public mises-en-scène of the Court, in parades and struggles, the mise-en-scène (of the film) has shown us the royal body only when caught in the looks of its subjects. It has duplicated our look with theirs. As if the actor had acted for our eyes, but also for those of the characters, the unease felt by Louis XVI at being a body exposed to the looks of his subjects, *but also* to our looks. The spectacle of this body gradually becomes as painful for the spectators in the film as for the spectators of the film. The duplication of looks is accompanied by an overlapping of places.¹³ The result is a kind of double transfer so that we recognise more and more the embarrassment we, the spectators, feel in the fictional embarrassment of the characters and of the King himself at the untenable place of the royal body; and in return make our own some of their reasons for no longer holding

13 Far and near, here and there, double inscription of the spectator's place in the auditorium and in the scene.

to that body or to that place. We have never seen anything but 53
Pierre Renoir's body, but this body has made us see the body too
much of Louis XVI with, dare I say, the eyes of his contemporaries,
and made us condemn it as they did: may it disappear!

Translation by Ben Brewster.

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METHUEN



Screen Acting and the Commutation Test

John O. Thompson

I

At the moment, only those who oppose the semiotic study of the cinema seem to want to talk about screen acting. Since a good deal of the meaning of the fiction film is borne by its actors and their performances, this amounts to leaving an important territory in the hands of the enemy (to put it over-belligerently). And some of the standard doctrines and endlessly rediscovered 'truths' about actor and role, screen vs stage and so on may be inhibiting not only critical but also creative practice in the cinema. Yet it is understandable why this gap in the semiotic programme remains. Performances seem ineffable, and thinking about them induces reverie rather than analysis.

In this essay I want to propose the controlled extension of one semiotic technique as a way of rehabilitating one mode of reverie. The technique is called the *commutation test* in European structural linguistics. I hope it will be plain that I do not believe that importing the technique will suddenly make our discourse about acting 'scientific': any advantage it brings will be more modest. However, I do think we need to start prompting a more methodical and reflexive discourse in this whole area, and here the *test* may help.

II

To begin with, here is a quotation from a recent essay by David Thomson which exemplifies, very flexibly and intelligently, the reverie approach to screen acting. The point the quotation first makes is a familiar one. Brecht, summing up a conversation with Adorno in his diary in 1942, asserted that 'the theatre's first advantage over the film is . . . in the division between play and performance', and continued 'the mechanical reproduction gives

56 everything the character of a result: unfree and inalterable'.¹ Thomson says the same thing, and then – but hesitantly, as if the exercise he proposes is somehow methodologically indefensible – manoeuvres around this apparent blockage at the heart of the cinema's 'nature':

'Stage parts are like concertos – they are supple, lofty and impersonal enough to take on all comers. But parts in films live only briefly: like virginity, once taken, they are not there to be inhabited again. Before shooting, all manner of choices may perplex the film-makers and keep the part blurred: Kim Novak's part(s) in *Vertigo* were designed for Vera Miles; Shirley Temple was first choice to play Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* – imagine how "Over the Rainbow" might have been cosy and wistful instead of the epitome of heartbreaking dreams. . . . Once a film is made no one else can play the part. . . . the text in movies is the appearance.

All credit then to Andrew Sarris . . . for indicating the waste in arguing over Vivien Leigh or Merle Oberon in Wyler's *Wuthering Heights*. And yet . . . the critic can usefully learn things about film through such speculations. . . . If *Vertigo* had had Vera Miles then the girl might have been as near to breakdown as the wife in *The Wrong Man*, and not the numb pawn of the plot that makes Novak pathetic and touching. . . . Or – think how sentimental *Kane* might be if Spencer Tracy had been the tycoon. That is useful if only to show how little conventional feeling the film has.'²

What I am struck by is an analogy between 'such speculations' and an 'operative concept . . . already found in Trubetzkoy, but . . . established under its present name by Hjelmslev and Udall, at the Fifth Congress of Phonetics in 1936'.³ The name given it was *commutation*, a word with unfortunate penal implications in English but originally synonymous with 'substitution'.⁴ Roland Barthes discusses the commutation test in *Elements of Semiology*, but in a very compressed manner:

'The commutation test consists of artificially introducing a change in the plane of expression (signifiers) and in observing whether this

1 Ben Brewster 'The fundamental reproach (Brecht)' *Ciné-tracts* n 2 Summer 1977 pp44-53

2 David Thomson 'The look on an actor's Face' *Sight and Sound* v 46 n 4 Autumn 1977 pp240-44

3 Roland Barthes *Elements of Semiology* London 1967 p65

4 This is the Oxford English Dictionary's third sense for the word. The first usage it records in this sense is, as so often when concepts which will turn out to be useful to a science of signs are concerned, theological. Hooker in 1597 wrote of 'a kind of mutuall commutation . . . wherby those concrete names God, and Man, when we speake of Christ doe take interchangeably one anothers roome'. The legal sense arises naturally enough: commutation is 'the substitution of a lesser punishment for a greater'

change brings about a correlative modification on the plane of contents (signifieds). . . . if the commutation of two signifiers produces a commutation of the signifieds one is assured of having got hold, in the fragment of syntagm submitted to the test, of a syntagmatic unit: the first sign has been cut off from the mass.⁵

Giulio Lepschy puts it even more briefly:

'By the *commutation test* we can check whether an exchange of elements on one plane entails a corresponding exchange on the other plane: if so we have two different elements; otherwise we have two variants of the same element.'⁶

What do these formulations mean? Some differences in language make a difference semantically; others don't, though they are perceptible and may bear information about the speaker's region, social class, sex, and so forth; still others are imperceptible save by means of sophisticated measuring instruments. The difference between *p* and *b* is of the first sort (*path* and *bath* are different words), while that between a higher *a* as pronounced in the north of England and the lower *a* of the south is of the second sort (*bath* is the same word with either *a*). The commutation test strictly speaking simply involves trying out a sound change and observing whether a meaning change is produced or not. Which meaning change may be irrelevant, because of the arbitrary, unmotivated linkage in language between sound and meaning.⁷ Thus, at the phonological level, there is no regularity in the shift of meaning produced by a given substitution: *path* is not to *bath* in any relation such that *pushed* and *bushed* are in the same relation. But at the morphological level – the level of minimal meaning units – some such alternations show significant regularities: eg *ride:rode; stride:strode*. This takes us into an area in which Saussure was prepared to speak of the linguistic sign's *relative motivation*.⁸ How does this compare with what Thomson is doing? He is proposing the substitution in thought of one actor for another, in order to observe not merely if a difference in meaning results but which difference results. And he is doing so in a context in which we naturally feel that motivation of the sign is important: our sense of whether *X* is 'right for the part'⁹ depends upon canons of suitability govern-

5 Barthes *ibid*

6 Giulio C Lepschy *A Survey of Structural Linguistics* London 1970 p72.

7 Barthes *op cit* p66, quotes a machine-translation expert to just this effect: "The difference between the significations [is] of use, the significations themselves being without importance" (Belevitch)

8 See Ferdinand de Saussure *Course in General Linguistics* London 1974 pp131-34

9 Note that, if 'the text in movies is the appearance' and the 'result' is really 'unfree and inalterable' absolutely – ie if for Thomson the medium intrinsically forces actor and role to coalesce utterly for the spectator – it is hard to see how our question of 'rightness for the part' could even be raised.

58 ing the signifier(actor) – signified(role) link which we generally assume to be non-arbitrary. One useful effect of thinking about commutation with the phonological analogy in mind is that it encourages us to query these assumptions about suitability, which turn out to be suffused with ideology and to shift with history. But there is no reason to believe that somehow with analysis all motivation should be shown to be illusory (reduction of cinema to language): ideology is not illusion.

III

It might seem that testing for whether substituting one actor for another makes any difference to a film's meaning would be pointless: 'Of course it must!' But this is not so. The stuntman, for instance, or the nude-scene stand-in both supply presences to the screen which have to seem indistinguishable from those of the actor or actress who is being stood in for: here much trouble is taken to ensure that the actual substitution of one body for another makes no difference to the text. Extras may generally be commuted with little if any change of meaning resulting. It's interesting to find that Equity's agreement with Thames Television explicitly defines an extra as 'a performer who is not required to give individual characterisations'¹⁰ – that is, a performer who need not, indeed should not, *distinguish* himself or herself. It is not surprising that one un-distinguished figure can be indistinguishably replaced by another. What constraints there are on meaning-preserving replacements seem to operate on the level of the crowd (or a more abstract unit such as the set of passers-by through the whole film): we would notice if *everyone* on the streets happened to be female, or to be bald, and so forth. There is an intermediate range of quite minor characters where the situation is blurred, but since the more films one has seen the more subtle individuations one picks up in the minor roles, it might be safest to treat them as functioning distinctively for the 'ideal viewer'. But occasionally indistinguishability is sought deliberately for the sake of the narrative. In Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* the promiscuity and vulgar fun-lovingness of Guy's wife Miriam is in part established by having her taken to the amusement park by two bland young men – who remain indistinguishable from one another over repeated viewings.

IV

Commutation is a device which is designed to allow us consciously

¹⁰ Quoted in Manuel Alvarado and Edward Buscombe *Hazell: The Making of a TV Series* London 1978 p20

to grasp units which were previously invisible, submerged in the smooth operation of the sign system in question. This is why it can work introspectively: one *asks oneself* if a change in the signifier would make a difference, and the answer can surprise one. To reject such devices as unnecessary is to claim that one possesses already both a competence in the language in question and a working theory of that competence. Where phonology is concerned, the latter claim is unlikely to be justified, because we devote so little attention ordinarily to observing minutely the sounds of our speech. But if all that the commutation of actors reveals is that Cary Grant is not Gary Cooper, it certainly isn't worth the trouble: our existing grasp of that gross difference is adequate enough already. If commutation is to justify itself in screen acting analysis, it must reveal something more delicate and less obvious. Why shouldn't we think of a screen performance as composed of 'finer' elements, *features* in the linguistic sense?

'Each of the segments in a word can be described as being the sum of a number of components or features. Thus the consonant *m* at the beginning of the word *man* can be said to have the feature of being voiced, the feature of being made at the bilabial place of articulation, the feature of being a nasal, and so on.'¹¹

The obvious answer is that John Wayne is more complex than a phoneme: whereas a phoneme can be characterized exhaustively in terms of a restricted number of features (Jakobson and Halle manage with twelve),¹² such an analysis is out of the question for the actor's rich and shifting screen presence. But if we move from phonological features to semantic features, the suggestion may not seem so wild. While no one could claim that we are even near to a generally acceptable account of natural language semantics, it can at least be said that:

'most current semantic theories, and many traditional ones too, analyze meaning into "smaller" component meanings, and assign to a lexical item a semantic representation consisting of a complex of semantically primitive elements.'¹³

Here a typical feature would be not \pm voiced or \pm nasal but \pm abstract or \pm animate or \pm male. How far decomposition into semantic features can be taken is currently a highly controversial question¹⁴ but it seems undeniable that componential analysis captures many necessary generalizations about the meaning rela-

11 Peter Ladefoged *A Course in Phonetics* New York 1975 p235

12 See Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle *Fundamentals of Language* The Hague 1971, or Ladefoged op cit pp240-49

13 Janet Dean Fodor *Semantics: Theories of Meaning in Generative Grammar* Hassocks 1977 p144

14 See Fodor pp143-214 for an up-to-date and detailed account of recent argument in the field

V

Let us see how far the notion of a film performance as a bundle of distinctive features can take us. Each feature functions as a potential distinguisher both within the film itself and in the indefinitely-extending space established by viewers' familiarity with cinema in general. For instance John Wayne's features contrast not only with James Stewart's in the films they both appear in but with Jean-Paul Belmondo's, even if the two actors have never in fact been textually juxtaposed. Texts leave some features and feature-contrasts wholly unthematized and others only implicitly thematized in order to concentrate explicitly on comparatively few. Unthematized features could be altered or redistributed without any change in the meaning of the film resulting. Members of a chain-gang or a chorus-line are distinguished from one another, like the rest of us, by the colour of their eyes; but switching eye-colours around would generally make no difference to the text. Perhaps most feature-contrasts are only lightly or implicitly thematized: switching features turns out when one thinks about it to make some difference – perhaps a great deal: a woman in the chain-gang? – but the film operates in such a way as not to encourage one to think about this. Here the commutation test has a useful de-naturalizing function. The canons of verisimilitude, plausibility, referentiality and so on that are operating suddenly become visible: *of course* there aren't co-ed chain gangs, the athletic hero can't be a dwarf, the Western hero can't have a Liverpool accent. In every film certain contrasts become highly thematized, presenting themselves as 'what the film is about'. Two or more characters are set up as rivals, as alternative love- or hate-objects (for other characters or the audience or both), as debaters, as couples, etc. *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*; Wayne and Stewart in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*; Bogart and Bacall *passim*; Ava Gardner and Grace Kelly in *Mogambo*; the cousins in *Les Cousins*; here and everywhere in the cinema the audience is explicitly called upon to compare and contrast.

So far we have been talking about features as they pertain to actors as 'nouns', but there is no reason in principle not to extend the programme to the analysis of characters' actions (to the enacted equivalents of 'verb' or 'adjective' predicates) and to the manner in which the actions are performed ('adverbial' features). For critical and pedagogical purposes it is sometimes helpful to restrict oneself to, or at least to set out from, contrasts explicitly thematized in a particular film; this guarantees the pertinence of the features scrutinized and keeps the set of possibilities to be commuted finite. Since, for example, we have no satisfactory finite list of types of

smile (although we can assign smiles to categories fairly precisely – thin-lipped, crazy, timid, etc), running through smile-types at random can seem pointless. But the contrast between the smiles of Ava Gardner and Grace Kelly in *Mogambo* is part of the system of that film. Imagining switching the smiles around, so that the young, inexperienced blonde has the sensual, shrewd, good-humoured smile while the older, experienced brunette has the repressed, seldom-used smile, teaches us a good deal about the system of assumptions about types of women which Ford is working within here.¹⁵ Yet it would be wrong always to limit commutation to contrasts embodied in the text. Commuting smiles in *Mogambo* with smile-types wholly foreign to the film (a crazy smile or a cruel smile, say) might or might not be unprofitable depending on the investigation in hand. Such a commutation might be pertinent to an examination of the bounds of decorum within which women in a film like *Mogambo* must keep if the overall good-humour of the action is to be sustained and the audience remain unthreatened. When the feature in question is part of a clearly limited paradigmatic set, we need worry even less about applying commutation independently of the film's own thematized contrasts. Perhaps the most obvious example of such a set is the male-female opposition: commutation here almost always has dramatic effects which get us to the heart of 'ordinary sexism' very quickly.

VI

Does one test by commuting whole actors or just features? This will depend. Commuting actors may be wasteful and lead to blurry intuitions: if it is already clear which feature is pertinent, manipulating it on its own may be indicated. And what presents itself as a whole-actor commutation may really be a single-feature commutation in disguise. Take the following sharp comment by Marjorie Bilbow, reviewing *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*:

'A woman seeking the release of sex without love will still attract moral judgements when films about men doing exactly the same thing are taken for granted. In fact, it makes a salutary mental exercise to transpose the lead characters in *Mr. Goodbar* and Truffaut's *The Man Who Loved Women*, which is primarily a light comedy. Both die sudden and violent deaths at the end; which of the two would you then say is being punished for sinning?'¹⁶

Clearly Marjorie Bilbow is not actually proposing that we check

15 The system in question is clearly rather widespread; exactly the same distribution of smile-types, correlated in the same way to hair-colour, turns up in Rohmer's *Ma Nuit Chez Maud*

16 *Screen International* n 129 11 March 1978 p30

62 the differences between Diane Keaton and Charles Denner (or between the roles they play) feature by feature as we transpose them. The relevant feature – gender – is already obvious. The use of speaking of the whole roles here is that it points up that not only sexual behaviour but ultimate fate stays constant under transposition; what varies as gender varies is the moral evaluation of that fate. Thus the *unexpected* ‘unit’ that the commutation isolates lies on the plane of the film’s ethical signifieds. In general, whole-actor commutation is useful when it is not yet clear which feature(s) will turn out to be pertinently differential, or how one feature aligns itself with others to effect a single thematized contrast. One feature of Diane Keaton as Teresa in *Mr. Goodbar* is her hair colour; but how this operates as a signifier in the film comes into focus less when we commute just hair colours – can she be a red-head? – than when we commute Keaton with Tuesday Weld as the blonde older sister, whose *died*-blondenness goes with *only-apparent* innocence in her father’s eyes but with *real* dumbness, contrasting with Teresa’s educatedness, sincerity, guilt in her father’s eyes.

VII

The sort of ‘units’ that commuting actors isolates – features or traits – are themselves clearly not unanalyzable primitives: a tempting but very ambitious programme would be to aim at a decomposition of physiognomies, smiles, gaits, and similar behaviours into distinctive features specified in physiological terms in the same way that phonological features are specified in terms of the mechanisms of the mouth, throat and tongue. Someone with a penchant for rigour might claim that characterizations such as ‘nervous smile’ or ‘crazy smile’ are hopelessly imprecise and impressionistic (‘tight-lipped smile’ being closer to a satisfactory description). However, there are good reasons for not taking the rigourist too seriously, though students of the cinema probably should pay more attention to recent advances in the study of non-verbal communication than we usually do.¹⁷ One trouble with the rigourist’s

17 An especially heroic research project in this area is that of Ekman and Friesen, who are endeavouring to specify a Facial Action code by isolating minimal units of muscular activity in the face: ‘... we spent the better part of a year with a mirror, anatomy texts, and cameras. We learned to fire separately the muscles in our own faces.’ So far the minimum units isolated number about forty-five, and the researchers have performed and photographed ‘between four and five thousand facial combinations’ of these units. ‘If we wish to learn all the facial actions which signal emotion and those that do not ... such a method ... is needed.’ See Paul Ekman and Wallace V Friesen ‘Measuring Facial Movement’ *Environmental Psychology and Nonverbal Behaviour* n 1 Fall 1976 pp56-75

programme is that for many inquiries it would be diversionary: the level of codedness one is interested in is more 'macro', more capable of being related to economic, political and ideological structures. But there is also a problem in principle about the search for primitive elements of behaviour: we have no guarantee that concepts such as 'suave, sophisticated manners', 'crazy smile', 'dizziness' (as in 'dizzy blonde') group together behaviours which are physiologically unitary. That is, there are almost certainly a number of muscularly distinct smiles which in this culture we would group together as 'crazy', and this would be even more true of what 'sophistication' or 'ruggedness' collect; yet it is at the level of these cultural groupings that we need to operate. Too 'micro' an analysis can destroy the object we are concerned with.

Commutation does respond to one element in the rigourist's reproach, in that its effect is to keep before our attention how problematic the terms we use to characterize differences among performances are. There seem to be differences without terms to capture them,¹⁸ and terms which bundle together an indefinite range of differences. (But in this respect our discourse about performance is like our discourse about everything else: it is how natural language operates.) This allows for considerable mobility over time in the conceptualizing of performances and their details: to recapture the terms that would have been used to characterize features of a silent film performance, for instance, often requires a considerable effort of historical imagination.

VIII

Analyzing an advertisement for Chanel No. 5 perfume consisting of a close-up of Catherine Deneuve, a picture of a bottle of the perfume, the brand-name in large letters at the bottom of the page and 'Catherine Deneuve for Chanel' in small letters just above this, Judith Williamson sees Chanel as using 'what Catherine Deneuve's face *means to us*' already to establish 'what

18 Cf Eugene A Nida *Componential Analysis of Meaning* The Hague 1975 p19: 'It would be a mistake to think that one can always describe easily the relations between related meanings. For some sets of meanings there may be no readily available terms with which one can talk about the differences. This is true, for example, of colors. We readily recognise that the colors *violet, blue, green, yellow, red*, etc, differ from one another, but we do not have the kind of metalanguage with which we can easily speak about the differences. One could employ technical terminology based on the wavelengths of different colors, but this does not represent the manner in which we normally conceive of color differences.' It would take us too far afield to go into the matter here, but it should be mentioned that both Wittgenstein and Lacan deny that there could be a true metalanguage for describing human action.

'It is only because Catherine Deneuve has an "image", a significance in one sign system, that she can be used to create a new system of significance relating to perfumes. If she were not a film star and famous for her chic type of French beauty, if she did not *mean* something to us, the link made between her face and the perfume would be meaningless. So it is not her face as such, but its position in a system of signs where it signifies flawless French beauty, which makes it useful as a piece of linguistic currency to sell Chanel.'¹⁹

Meaning in a sign system depends on difference; Williamson chooses as a differing woman-sign a model who appears in the ad campaign for Fabergé's *Babe* perfume:

'Catherine Deneuve has significance only in that she is not, for example, Margaux Hemingway. . . . The significance of [the latter's] novelty, youth and "Tomboy" style, which has value only *in relation* to the more typically "feminine" style usually connected with modelling, is carried over to the perfume: which is thus signified as new and "fresh", in relation to other established perfumes. There would be no significance at all in the fact that Margaux Hemingway is wearing a karate outfit and has her hair tied back to look almost like a man's, were it not that *other* perfume ads show women wearing pretty dresses and with elaborately styled hair.'²⁰

I think Williamson's discussion may overstate the ultimate reducibility to difference of this whole realm of signification, but this is not to say that difference is not immensely important. I want to use Deneuve as an example of the operation of 'the formal relations of pre-existing systems of differences', because these systems are not only what 'advertisements appropriate'²¹ but are in the cinema important determinants of *casting*.

Williamson's argument is that we have a much more secure grasp of the difference between Deneuve and Hemingway than we have, or could ever have ('perfumes *can* have no particular significance')²² – with respect to the product; so that transferring the former difference to the latter realm has a persuasive, because cognitive, effect.²³ The question is, in what sense do those firm

19 *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* London 1978 p25

20 *Ibid* p26

21 *Ibid* p27

22 *Ibid* p25. Smells may be meaningless but they are certainly evocative. For a very interesting discussion of why evocativeness may be raised by the fact that 'there is no semantic field of smells', see Dan Sperber *Rethinking Symbolism* Cambridge 1975 pp115-19

23 ' . . . this seems like the reverse of "totemism", where *things* are used to differentiate groups of people . . . ', Williamson p27

Deneuve-Hemingway differences exist before one makes that specific comparison? It arises for me with special force in this particular case because it was possible for me fully to follow Williamson's discussion although I knew nothing whatsoever of Margaux Hemingway before reading it. In effect, Williamson has performed a Deneuve-Hemingway commutation, and my prior ignorance of one element in the commutation has not prevented it from 'working'. How can this be? Actually, the significances which Williamson ascribes to Deneuve — '*famous* for her *chic* type of *French* beauty . . . *flawless*' — are not in an uncomplicatedly differential relationship to those of the Hemingway 'image'. Logically enough, but also as if to compensate for Deneuve's $+fame$, Hemingway has $+novelty$ whereas Deneuve has $-novelty$ (the link between her and Chanel has been maintained for an unusually long time). But one would hardly assign $-chic$ to Hemingway (although the *type* of chic shifts); her $-French$ trait is not unequivocal ('Margaux' vs 'Margo',²⁴ and perhaps a whiff of 'American-in-Paris'-ness left over from another Hemingway); and while someone engaged in karate seems unlikely to maintain 'flawless beauty', one clearly could not speak of a 'flawed beauty'. The underlying contrast seems to involve something like $\pm mobility$: Hemingway can retain her sort of beauty in motion, whereas one cannot imagine the Chanel Deneuve being able to move much without her beauty becoming flawed.

What seems to happen is that such individual images as Deneuve's or Hemingway's find or make their place(s) within a network of differences already provided for *by the language*; it is within language that the contrast 'feminine'/'Tomboy' is kept 'in place', and this is a necessary condition for that contrast's embodiment both in the real and in image-deployment within specialized discourses like advertising. At this level, the same contrast $\pm feminine$ could be embodied by an indefinite number of different figures. But conversely each individual figure is a composite of an indefinite number of determinations, and while only a subset of these will be highlighted by any given commutation, it will still put into play contrasts involving more than a single feature. This means that a contrast on $\pm mobility$ will always involve more than *just* that once the specific feature-bundle 'Margaux Hemingway' is chosen to embody one pole, even when the other pole is left general ('other perfume ads show women wearing pretty dresses and with elaborately styled hair'); and it will become even richer once the specific feature-bundle 'Catherine Deneuve' is installed at the other pole. This detailed richness is

24 An interesting problem: is there anything 'French' about the image of Catherine Deneuve if her name is taken away? (What happens if the Chanel ad remains just as it is save for the substitution of, say, 'Shirley Saunders for Chanel'?)

66 what could not have existed before I knew about Margaux Hemingway, and each new bit of data I acquire about the image enriches the contrast further. But the concepts to illustrate which Williamson posed the contrast of the two images are not dependent upon this richness: many models and actresses could have been chosen who would have embodied any one feature contrast just as well.

The main difference between choosing a model for an advertisement and casting for a film is that the requirements of narrative structure in film, however constraining on their own level, put the features of the actor into play more actively than advertisements do. If there is a single image of Deneuve at work in the Chanel ads and in her films, it is presented and developed more unpredictably where narrative brings out its potential ambiguities.

When Burt Reynolds asked Robert Aldrich to direct him in *Hustle*, Aldrich said:

“ ‘I’ll do this picture on one condition: that you help me get Miss Chanel.’ ’ Because the woman’s part had been written for an American, and I didn’t think it worked that way. I think our middle-class mores just don’t make it credible that a policeman can have a love relationship with a prostitute. Because of some strange quirk in our backgrounds, the mass audience doesn’t believe it. It’s perfectly all right as long as she’s not American. So Burt accepted this as a condition, and we put up our money and went to Paris, and waited on the great lady for a week, and she agreed to do the picture.’ ”²⁵

Here the role in the script included the feature +*American*, and the director modified this to –*American* on credibility grounds. Whether or not Aldrich’s unacceptability intuition about the cluster +*American* +*prostitute* +*loved by policeman* was idiosyncratic²⁶ (the casting of Deneuve seems to me to be splendid, but I wouldn’t have thought credibility was its strong point), it certainly underdetermines the choice of Deneuve from the very large set of un-American actresses. The associative leap to ‘Miss Chanel’ shows that more of the ‘Deneuve’ feature-bundle was involved, and the tone of the remark about ‘waiting on the great lady’²⁷ might suggest that part of this might be a certain wish to

25 Stuart Byron (interviewing Robert Aldrich) “ ‘I can’t get Jimmy Carter to see my movie!’ ” *Film Comment* n 13 March-April 1977 p52
26 In *The Choirboys* the cluster reappears, but its ‘unacceptability’ is now inscribed within the text itself in the form of the violence of a ‘bad’ sado-masochistic relationship leading to the policeman’s shame and suicide.

27 The phrase helps clarify a second Deneuve Chanel ad reproduced by Williamson op cit p28, in which a head-and-shoulders photograph of Deneuve with Chanel bottles bears the text ‘It’s one of the pleasures of being a woman’. The image might be puzzling because Deneuve is unsmiling, stern-looking, not obviously enjoying any ‘pleasure’ – save, perhaps, that of being ‘the great lady’.

flaw the 'unflawed', to exploit the possibilities of the Miss-Chanel-as-prostitute twist. But there must be something about the bundle which facilitates this twist anyway, since any specification of Deneuve's image in terms of film roles would have to take Bunuel's *Belle du Jour* as a central text. While it and *Hustle* draw on the features that make Deneuve an appropriate signifier for Chanel, both films in different ways put these features at the service of narratives which draw out their darker implications – in *Belle du Jour* the –mobility feature is used to connote both frigidity and corpselikeness; in *Hustle* the 'flawlessness' is made to begin to crack around the edges.

A Catherine Deneuve ad and a Catherine Deneuve film clearly both operate as closed texts to a greater or lesser degree (both *Belle du Jour* and *Hustle* being more open than many, as it happens, whereas a more conventional film such as Terence Young's *Mayerling* might even exceed Chanel ads in closure): but the mechanisms by which they achieve their closure are different, and are themselves made visible by the commutation we achieve by holding Deneuve constant while changing the textual practices which serve as the context of her presentation. The ever-open possibility of doing this leaves the Chanel advertisements open to a certain subversion. So does the way that the Deneuve image is built up from appearances of which some are so narratively charged: Chanel cannot prevent us from thinking of the parts Deneuve has played for Bunuel and Aldrich, with their unwanted, unsettling features.

IX

There is room for a great deal of detailed research on the history of casting. The breathless run-through of casts once contemplated for well-known films given in a recent article by Linda Rosenkrantz²⁸ illustrates the sort of material which could be of great use in determining which star images were contemplatable for which roles at a given time. It would be good to have accounts of actual casting practice detailed enough to serve as a control on the intuitions commutation affords us about possible and impossible matchings of actor to role. Clearly, casting is subject to powerful ideological constraints. A given role must be filled by someone who possesses or can assume the features felt necessary to sustain it, and both the determination of the features in the script and the organisation of their textualisation in the course of filming will be governed by ideological assumptions about what is 'natural' and 'goes without saying'.

In Don Siegel's *The Shootist*, John Wayne plays an aging gun-

28 'The role that got away' *Film Comment* n 14 Jan-Feb 1978 pp42-48

68 fighter dying of cancer and James Stewart plays the doctor who diagnoses the disease. I have never met anyone who could imagine the casting reversed, yet it's hard to see why. Most people, after some thought, say that they can imagine Stewart in the Wayne role (it helps to think back to Stewart's unmannered performances in Anthony Mann westerns). What seems 'ungrammatical' is Wayne as a doctor. But what is it that we think we know about doctors that makes Wayne's bundle of traits incompatible with his being one? An adjective which sometimes gets used to describe Wayne is 'rugged': this is not incompatible with delicacy, as any reviewing of *Rio Bravo* reminds us, but it does seem incompatible with the sort of *indoor* and *studied* (the product of study) delicacy of movement that a doctor, especially a surgeon, is felt to need. Of course the frontier doctor in westerns isn't exactly a Dr. Kildare, but his lack of polish is generally presented as a *decline*, however good-natured, from an earlier level of competence reached 'back East'. The frontier doctor can thus deviate in the direction of a certain ruggedness (often on account of Drink), but he generally retains such unrugged features as —*tall* and —*athletic*. A counter-example in terms of these specific features, Victor Mature's Doc Holliday in Ford's *My Darling Clementine*, is tall and athletic but consumptive, alcoholic and bookish; commuting Wayne with Mature here would be unthinkable.

This would seem to suggest that, outside the specific generic context of the Hospital drama, the medical profession is somehow not seen as *macho* enough to sustain a central position within the Hollywood narrative. (Think how impossible it is that *The Shootist* be *about* James Stewart.) Yet this is puzzling, because the medical profession clearly does not lack prestige in America. Why should the role of gunman be worth so much more narratively? This is the sort of question that the facts revealed by commutation force us to ask. They are not easily dealt with by any 'reflection' or 'inverted reflection' model of ideology in fiction — whether what is thought to be reflected is the real or the producing culture's ideal.

X

I want to conclude briefly by returning to Brecht's 'fundamental reproach', which was that because in the cinema the role and the performer are one, there is no possibility of introducing the sort of gap between them that promotes reflection. There is a problem here, but it does not seem to be insuperable if we are prepared to take as our unit of experience of the cinema, not just the text itself as subject to/contributor to a larger system of possibilities and impossibilities which is like, and to a large extent depends upon, our language. This involves recognising that like language the sign systems of the cinema are never textually embodied all at

once: to restrict analysis to the 'text itself', to rule out counterfactual statements on methodological grounds, would be a surrender to dogmatic empiricism. 69

A limited gap is opened between actor and role, I think, by the star system itself, with its encouragement to the viewer to see a single figure on the screen as both role and star. What is needed to exploit that gap and open it wider is an awareness, which teaching can promote, of the dependence of both role-meaning and star-meaning upon a network of differences correlated with one another in seemingly naturalised, hence suspect, ways. My practical claim for the commutation test is that it promotes in the viewer the right sort of suspicion.

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The Camera I Observations on Documentary

Annette Kuhn

INTRODUCTION Discussions of the space film occupies within ideological discourse tend to dismiss documentary as irredeemably implicated in an analogical mode of representation and an ideological régime from which it can take no distance. This has meant that documentary films have scarcely begun to be treated in terms other than those they set for themselves, that is in terms of the extent to which they reveal a/the truth about whatever they are addressing. Where discussion of documentary film has been attempted, it has been frozen within its own ideological space with the result that its operation with regard to the production of meaning – as a semiotic system – has remained taken for granted. Thus although Comolli and Narboni refer to the operation of a film practice when they say of *cinéma direct* that it embodies

‘ that magical notion of “ seeing is understanding ”: ideology goes on display to prevent itself from being shown up for what it really is, contemplates itself but does not criticise itself,’¹

this also applies to much critical/descriptive work associated with that kind of practice. The two discourses occupy the same ideological space, validating one another. The inevitable outcome is a certain amount of confusion: a collapsing of fiction and non-fiction resulting from attempts to describe documentary in terms of film language seen as a general cinematic sign system, for example, or a movement away from a questioning of naïve realism in the context of the documentary and onto the terrain of Truth.² Since attempts made within the terms of this discourse to step beyond

1 J-L Comolli and P Narboni, ‘ Cinema/ideology/criticism ’ *Screen* v 12 n 1 1971 p 34 and *Screen Reader* 1, 1977

2 ‘ The cinema . . . is a language which adheres closely to reality but which never exactly reproduces it ’. L. de Huesch *The Cinema and Social*

72 the limits of the problematic it inscribes have inevitably encountered contradictions (which by reason of the very nature of the project have remained unarticulated) it is hardly surprising that much that has been written about documentary film practice has been descriptive and has accepted it on its own terms, as a transparent rendering of events, societies, personalities. Associated with this is a movement away from texts and spectator-text relationships back towards the conditions of film production, a concern which is voiced in a degree of technological determinism, so that the technical features of documentary film making are, if only because little else is discussed, elevated to the status of defining features not only of the film-making practice but also of film texts. In this context, the assumptions behind Jean Rouch's statement that what made his type of film-making possible was

' a kind of tool which made the observation of man's movements possible. . . . The second essential revolution was to make it possible to use light, portable 16mm equipment that cost four times less than usual ' ³

are quite characteristic of critical work on documentary film. There is a notable absence of writing on the subject of documentary which considers it as a specific body of films either in terms of the ' formal ' characteristics of film texts or with regard to the modes of address and subject positions constructed by them.

But there are good reasons for this virtual absence of a meta-language for documentary film: it is grounded exactly in various specific features of the language of documentary. Because of their avowed status as non-fictions, there is a tendency to place documentary films outside the legitimate space of analysis of narrativity in films, a tendency which rests on a conflation of fiction and narrative. The absence of marks of meaning production in such films, their presentation of themselves as transparent, entails also an apparent lack of any language other than that of everyday speech (or natural/naturalised language). The signs of the production of meaning in the fiction film may be contained but nonetheless displayed to some degree – as ' style ' for instance. In the documentary, however, they are simultaneously disavowed and subject to a work of effacement: ' style ' is inappropriate, the image ' speaks for itself '. At the same time, any practice aimed at analysing/(de)constructing narrative – especially if, like the *grande syntagmatique*, it is founded in linguistics – must by virtue of the narrative/fiction conflation exclude nonfictions. Nevertheless it seems to me that a

Science Paris UNESCO 1962 p. 14 etc: ' Naturalism . . . is something we have really moved beyond. . . . Direct cinema fundamentally questions what the image is. . . . The image must indicate the real ', L. Marcorelles *Living Cinema* London 1973 pp 22 and 97

³ Quoted in G R Levin *Documentary Explorations* New York 1971 p 133

number of concerns evinced in mundane or naturalised accounts of documentary film can inform the construction of a metalanguage for documentary: a metalanguage which could be mapped on to that already offered by Bill Nichols, who moves towards the central issue of mode of address through an implicit critique of Metz's celebration of narrative and a consideration of verbal address in documentary film. As he argues,

'there are specific signifying procedures in documentary and . . . they are not dependent upon documentary's occasional utilisation of narrative techniques'⁴

but are organised in their formal structure around 'codes of exposition'. In spite of the centrality of exposition in the documentary with voice-over or bridging commentary, this leaves out of account the important category of documentary films whose address emanates solely from the image track; in such cases the central issue which would inform a shift from discourse to metadiscourse is the instance of *observation*. This, in other words, leads to a consideration of address in documentaries in visual rather than or as well as in verbal terms, and permits engagement with those documentary films which in one way or another lack exposition – films whose mode of address is indirect and which by definition cannot readily be inscribed by a model based on verbal exposition as a defining feature of mode of address. To judge from most existing accounts of documentary, the defining characteristics of that body of films (or rather, given the terms of the discussion, of that film-making practice) do pivot on the question of the rendering visible of, the representation of, the already observable: that is, the ways in which a non-fictional world ('reality') is conveyed filmically; the place of the technological means of image/sound (re)production in the transmission of that world; the relations of its production, and of its immediate production in particular; and the importance of on-the-spot observation and the centrality of the film crew or simply of the camera operator. This question of the rendering visible of the observable immediately locates the camera eye, but also the human eye, most evidently that of the camera operator, as the site of observation. As soon as mode of address is raised, however, the eye of the spectator of the film also acquires that status.

NONFICTION A nonfiction film is one which declares that a pro-filmic event has not been constructed or arranged for the purpose of producing a film. This definition is by no means unproblematic: there are many films which present themselves as non-fictions but in which a manipulation, if not an actual construction, of profilmic events has taken place, and in that sense concern comes to be

⁴ B Nichols 'Documentary theory and practice' *Screen* v 17 n 4 1976/7 p 36

74 expressed as to the 'authenticity' of such films. Many documentary film makers have engaged with this by adopting a purist approach to their practice expressed in an

'unwillingness to assert control . . . so far as to refuse to recreate events, to have people repeat actions for the sake of being filmed',⁵

but much controversy has centred on the influence that the mere presence of a film crew, complete with equipment, may have on filmed events. This is similar to the methodological concern surrounding fieldwork procedures in general and participant observation in particular, and it is significant that such concern has by no means restricted itself to film-making which is grounded in behavioural, sociological or anthropological research, though the greatest preoccupation with the methodological implications of manipulating profilmic events in shooting, and also reconstructing their temporal sequence through editing, is in fact evinced by film-makers whose province is marked by a 'research' orientation. Here the awareness of 'bias' inherent in selection, manipulation and assembly may lead to a search for a neutral use of profilmic space and time in such a way that the marks of this neutrality are evident in the film itself. The pure research film would be one from which only blank frames and optical failures are cut out, in which there is no editing after shooting, and which may even incorporate in the image evidence of its own integrity with regard to real time by the inclusion of a clock in frame.⁶ Other types of documentary film whose concern may be a 'truthful' rendering may inscribe a different methodology, or move away in certain respects from the equation of truth with observational neutrality, so that in American direct cinema, for example, attention is directed to the adoption of a stance of neutrality vis-à-vis the profilmic event – that is towards engagement in uncontrolled filming – while at the same time the truth of the recorded event is not posed in absolute terms nor in the terms of a neutral academic discourse, but as the truth of the film maker – or, as James Blue has described Richard Leacock's work, 'one man's truth'. In such a case, internal evidence of neutrality is replaced by a text whose 'truth' may be judged only by means of extra-textual evidence (interviews, etc), or otherwise taken as given within the terms of the project of posing

'the essential subjectivity of the person seeing the events being filmed [as] necessary for the unity of the film',⁷

where that person is assumed to be the film-maker.

5 S Mamber *Cinéma Vérité in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary* Cambridge Mass. 1974 p 2

6 J Collier *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* New York 1967 Ch 10

7 P Hockings ed *Principles of Visual Anthropology* Hague Mouton 1975 p 72

TECHNOLOGY The central place assigned to technology as a defining feature of documentary film *production* comes, by an unarticulated displacement, to incorporate also the material and signifying qualities of the film so that technology is then also held as a/the determining feature of documentary film *texts*. Such an elevation of the technological means of production informs virtually all writing on documentary: direct cinema in the US, for example, is widely held to have been made possible solely because in 1960 Drew Associates were instrumental in the development of a silent, portable camera with synch sound, while French *cinéma vérité* is likewise seen as the outcome of the development of the Eclair synch-sound camera which was made available to Rouch and Morin for the shooting of *Chronique d'Un Été*. The determining status claimed for this type of film-making technology turns on what is held to be the necessity not to manipulate the profilmic event: a requirement which in turn rests on the assumed need to inscribe neutrality, objectivity or truth in the recording process and, by a conceptual elision of shooting with laboratory processing and editing, in the film itself.

That 16mm portable synch-sound equipment facilitates production is not in question; it becomes possible, for example, to undertake location shooting in natural light with fast film; to follow the spontaneous movements of subjects in the film; to film relatively unobtrusively with a two-person, or even a one-person, crew; to record unscripted sounds and speech. But to suggest that technology is determining is a different argument altogether: to pose the question in this way is to suggest that technology itself is outside of determination. It is, however, quite possible to reverse the terms of the assertion and to give good grounds for doing so – in other words, to argue, in the particular instance of documentary film, that certain types of equipment were developed and marketed expressly to make a specific type of film-making possible and that therefore the technological developments were themselves not innocent of historical/ideological overdetermination. In the context of determinations of or on technology may be placed the widely held notion that film-making equipment is an encumbrance to be dispensed with as far as possible in certain situations,⁸ precisely in those situations in which 'reality' or 'truth' is to be recorded and cinematically represented. The ideological implication of these notions of technology can be seen in the move to efface or deny profilmic events, a move which takes concrete form in the documentary film-making practice of meaning-producing institutions like the BBC, which has celebrated the skill which is devoted to presenting the

8 'The film-maker must be free to follow action without dominating it through sheer mechanical presence. Tripods, heavy lights, cables and the rest of the paraphernalia of studio shooting are eliminated' Mamber op cit p 3

76 subject matter as if the equipment and the technical processes were not there.⁹

In documentary films, it appears that the truth or authenticity of a representation turns precisely on an exclusion from that representation – or denial within it – of the means of its own material and semiotic production, which means that truth or authenticity has to be taken at *face value* – ideology contemplating itself – without recourse to textual marks of authenticity. Nevertheless, a text may offer certain substitute evidence of its own ‘truth’ constituted in a set of codes which at specific conjunctures connote authenticity (black-and-white photography, unsmooth camera movements, focus-pulling, undifferentiated sound, for example) and thus resolve any contradiction between an assertion of truth and a lack of evidence supporting that assertion by a displacement which constitutes a representation as a set of codes which in themselves signal self-evident truth.

RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION An extension of the technological determinist argument poses the means of production of films as directly determining their relations of production. Where documentary is concerned, this always refers to the means of recording – that is, camera and sound equipment: technological means of film production and consumption other than these (such as processing or projection machinery) are significantly absent from the argument. In this way the conditions of immediate production are foregrounded at the expense of all other aspects of the production process, so that attention is focussed on only one stage in the production of film – its shooting. The moment of shooting is considered all-important and the film crew assumes a central place alongside its technological adjuncts in discussions of documentary film. This stands in contrast with discussions of fictional narrative film, many features of whose actual production (including shooting) are commonly taken for granted in critical discourse, and where if anybody it is the director, rather than technicians, who may be seen to occupy a determining role: in such cases the director is rarely, if ever, a technician. The points within relations of documentary production at which emphasis is laid – and indeed the absences, the points not considered at all – underline what is constituted as the centrality of the camera operator. In documentary, if there is an *auteur*, then the *auteur* is the camera operator: Leacock, Pennebaker, Rouch are all seen as the authors of the films with which they are associated. Such films come to be evaluated in terms of the skill involved in using the camera at the right place and time and in the right way, so that as much editing as possible is done ‘in the camera’ – a point which relates in the first instance to

⁹ See R Cawston et al *Principles and Practice in Documentary Programmes* London 1972 p 7

the need felt to respect the chronology of the profilmic event: but underlying this also is the notion that shooting – not editing – is the primary site of film production and that it is for the camera operator to make decisions relating to the structure of the film at the moment of shooting. The sound operator tends to occupy a secondary position as regards authorship, and it is no coincidence that there is often a sexual division of labour in documentary film crews which places women recording sound and men operating camera.¹⁰ In this relationship is inscribed a dual hegemony: not only the hegemony of the visible – of what can be seen *from a certain position* – which is built into the construction of the camera as a machine and privileges the means of recording the visible as opposed to the audible, but also the male dominance of those means of (re)producing the visible.

OBSERVATION The hegemony of the visible without doubt informs the stress laid on the significance of on-the-spot observation in the production of documentary films. Equally, though, it underpins the methodological and even the epistemological debates which place the question of observation in the context of such notions as objectivity, truth, verification and evidence. Observation hinges upon seeing, which when it involves film-making crucially takes place at two points: first, at the eye of the human observer, the camera operator; and second, at the eye of the camera itself. As far as human observation is concerned, positivist assumptions about subject-object relations are by and large not adopted uncritically in the social sciences; however, where the 'camera eye' is concerned there often seems to be a suspension of any critical attitude to methodology and an assumption that the camera is a neutral recording instrument, or perhaps that it operates as an extension to the camera operator and his or her subjectivity and can only in this sense be a participant. An example of the former position is the purist kind of ethnographic film-making, and of the latter direct cinema which elevates the camera operator to the position of 'someone watching as much as possible from the inside' whose camera is a means of representing this participant position. It seems that two separate points of neutrality are being posed here: that of the human observer and that of the camera eye. Where non-filmic observation is concerned, a wholly positivist methodology would assume a radical disjuncture between subject and object, which as the basis of any methodological procedure is commonly seen to be highly problematic: but where filmic observation is concerned, the subject-object disjuncture seems to have been shifted away from the human observer and on to the camera. At the same moment, as far as the place of the film crew is concerned, the question of

10 See the special issue of *Film Comment* v 9 n 6 1973 on documentary, which contains a number of photographs of documentary crews at work.

78 'membership' seems to have displaced that of neutrality: that is to say, the issue at stake seems to be whether the camera operator or crew share a common cultural membership with their subjects. The result is a movement in which the question of neutrality is mapped over by the question of membership, but within which the camera is still regarded as neutral, or at most, if seen as participant, as an extension of its operator. No notion of the ideological complicity of the camera informs the latter position. However, the model which poses observation as seeing at two points, in privileging the moment of shooting in the observation process, misses the third point at which observation takes place – the moment of watching the film. The third eye is the eye of the spectator, who is completely absent in that kind of critical/descriptive work on documentary which operates wholly within the terms adopted by its own film-making practice.

A movement from the film-maker's observation to the audience's seeing – an introduction of the spectator into the documentary film – at once permits a move towards a metalanguage which can engage with spectator-text relationships and the ways in which documentaries inscribe an audience in their mode of address. Bill Nichols has begun this work by posing two modes of address for documentary film – direct and indirect, according to whether or not the viewer is explicitly acknowledged as the subject to which the film is addressed – and by discussing the former, the 'expository genre': that type of documentary film which makes a direct address to the spectator by means of a spoken commentary or narration which is in effect privileged over the visual track and tends to become the dominant voice of the film. Although historically it is true that, as Nichols says, most documentaries have used direct address in one way or another, nevertheless documentaries in which exposition is absent or minimal are a challenge to the expository genre, and the absence of exposition has certainly been a defining characteristic of such movements as direct cinema in both the United States and Europe. These are *observational* films: certainly in the sense that the observation process is inscribed in their shooting, but more importantly – especially with regard to differentiating them from other forms of documentary – in terms of the particular way in which they place the spectator as observer. It is this which constitutes the definition of observational film as a type of documentary: the space of such a film practice is marked out by a particular form of spectator-text relationship which holds the spectator in the same position of observer as the camera operator and the camera. Although such a practice may well, as Nichols suggests, risk incomprehensibility in the absence of an exposition which fixes or limits meaning (the distinction is between a film that shows and a film that tells), the risk of polysemy tends to be recouped by the defined and confined space in which the viewer is held – as observer. Such a placing of the spectator as observer is de-

pendent on means of signification which are effaced or denied in the text so that the image may be read as a transparent rendering of 'reality'. In this way, the 'truth' of the profilmic event is taken for granted by virtue of the operation of certain codes which signify nonfictional authenticity while at the same time constituting themselves as absent in the text. A more specific accomplishment of the observational film, however, is the elevation of the camera eye to a position of centrality in the process of observation, a position in which it then holds the spectator who consequently occupies the privileged place of the camera. There are various types of observational film whose precise mode of address turns on the movement between the camera seen merely as a tool of observation and the camera seen as central to the observation process in embodying the extended subjectivity of the operator. In the first instance, the camera operator is constituted as an absence and the camera eye itself becomes the privileged place of the spectator: this is the instance of the ethnographic film offering itself as a neutral academic discourse whose address is defined by an absence of authorship. In the second case, the eye of the camera is a displacement of the eye of the camera operator, the instance of the direct cinema film which offers its address in the first person, but then moves that first person between that of the camera operator and that of the spectator.

Within the category observational film – documentary embodying an indirect mode of verbal address – distinction may be made between the pure ethnographic film and the direct cinema film on the basis of the different ways in which they inscribe, or do not inscribe, authorship and how this informs their address of spectators. The authorless discourse posed by ethnographic film practice presents the same absence of subjectivity as academic writing, so that the academic discourse constitutes itself as embodying neutral knowledge or even truth. The pure research film in which camera movement and angling are avoided and the temporal space of the filmed event is not reorganised by editing actually foregrounds in these strategies its status as research, defining and upholding its own project of offering an unbiased and unmediated representation. That is, it exhibits its own truth through internal textual evidence indicating a lack of manipulation of profilmic events. In this way the risk of incomprehensibility is circumvented by a text which would precisely present itself as not wholly comprehensible because incomplete and unstructured, but at the same time as a 'true' and unmediated representation of events. On the other hand the 'personal' approach characteristic of direct cinema documentary, in placing spectator, film-maker and camera alike in an identical position of 'eye-witness' foregrounds subjectivity in its address in a thoroughgoing manner. The problem this might seem to pose for the 'veracity' of the representation is circumvented precisely because such films present themselves as 'personal points of view': at the

80 same time, however, veracity is guaranteed by the authorial and/or institutional status of the film maker.

Having distinguished between ethnographic film and direct cinema documentary on the grounds of their different articulations of filmic address, it should nonetheless be pointed out that there exists a type of observational film commonly described as ethnographic in terms of its methodology and institutional provenance whose address is by no means defined in terms of the positioning of the spectator with the camera eye and the offering of an authorless discourse: this is that group of films whose existence is grounded in what has been called 'ethnomethods'. Ethnomethods embraces 'two approaches . . . one in anthropology called ethno-science, the other in sociology called ethnomethodology',¹¹ whose project is to investigate those assumptions which provide the routine grounds for everyday activities, or in Malinowski's words to 'grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of the world'. The distinction between ethnoscience and ethnomethodology lies in the nature of 'membership' of the observer who provides accounts of the life-world of the native: that is whether or not he/she is a member of the native's culture. The films made by Navajo Indians¹² provide an example of 'ethnographic' films whose project is in effect ethnoscientific in that they are offered by Sol Worth and John Adair, the directors of the research programme as part of which the films were made, as evidence of the Navajos' vision of the world. What happens here is that the subjectivity of the camera operator again becomes crucial to the address of the film, indeed it is its explicit *raison d'être*, but the risk to dominant film language of any 'strangeness' which might be implied in this particular form of indirect address is recouped in at least two ways. In the first place, the subjectivity inscribed in the address is a cultural, and not an individual, subjectivity: for instance in the case of the Navajo films the point of origin of the text would be the Navajo culture which is seen to 'influence not only their [the Indian film makers'] semantic and thematic choices of image, but also their syntactic choices, the very way they put these images together in a sequence',¹³ and not the individuals who make the films.

This means that the significance of these particular films is fixed in a specific way: they become objects of ethnological interest, read through a written account of the 'fieldwork' situation within which the films were made, and for those who may not have read

11 G Psathas 'Ethnomethods and phenomenology' *Social Research* 35 1968 p 500

12 See S Worth and J Adair *Through Navajo Eyes* Bloomington, Indiana 1972

13 *Ibid* p 45

that account, prefaced by a long introduction which fixes them as products of an alien culture and imposes a reading of them as such. The discourse of these and other ethnoscientific films then becomes enclosed within an anthropological discourse, which shifts their mode of address away from camera eye or camera operator as point of origin onto the institutional formation constituted as anthropology.¹⁴ The spectator sees not through Navajo eyes but through anthropology's eyes: the privileged discourse is displaced from its material source on to an ideological point of origin by becoming enclosed within a particular metadiscourse which, in the particular instance of the Navajo films, takes the form of a direct address to the spectator which overrides the indirect address of the films themselves. The observational film is in such circumstances – precisely those in which there is a risk that the place of the spectator may not be readily constituted by the operation of textual codes in the image track connoting authenticity – likely to be translated into the expository mode by the imposition of a direct mode of address.

CONCLUSION In an attempt to shift the terms within which documentary film has commonly been discussed, terms which serve simply as a legitimization of certain film-making practices and institutions, I have offered some suggestions as to how it might be possible to constitute a metadiscourse for documentary. It is significant that the self-validating discourse of documentary tends to privilege, on several levels, the moment of production over and above the moment of consumption, and to conflate the production of footage with the production of meaning. One particular point in the process of film production is commonly foregrounded: the context and process in which films are shot, and within this, in particular, the work of the camera operator, who in certain forms of documentary may even be elevated to the position of *auteur*. Associated with a particular kind of emphasis on the production process is a tendency to assume a dominant role for the technological means of production (the camera in particular) in determining modes of representation. In discussions of documentary the emphasis on selected moments in the process of producing footage has served to permit the suppression of any notion of meaning production and hence of any consideration of what is evidently a crucial moment in the production of meaning in film, that of viewing. At the same time, and on the face of it paradoxically, there is rarely any consideration of the various institutional contexts within which documentaries are produced.

Most of the present discussion of these issues has been directed at the first of these two points, in which context it is important to

14 M Eaton and I Ward 'Anthropology and film' *Screen* v 17 n 3 1976 p 113

82 consider the positions offered for the spectator in various kinds of documentary film. To this end I have attempted to examine the question of filmic address in relation to documentary by moving away from Bill Nichols' use of the concept to refer simply to verbal exposition in documentary and towards some consideration of how documentary address might inscribe certain spectator positions invoked by the structures of the look – pivoting, that is to say, on the visible as opposed to the verbal. All forms of documentary, whether or not they also embody any direct verbal address, do inscribe spectator positions which hinge on various articulations of the instance precisely of observation. They work in such a way by posing a variety of relationships between the eye or the look of the spectator, that of the camera, and that of the camera operator. Because in documentary film the apparently self-evident and unmediated 'truth' of the visible is fetishised, the spectator is placed in a relation hinging upon his or her command of that which is observed. The spectator becomes the observer *par excellence*. Different types of documentary film may then be identified according to the specific way in which this spectator-observer position is articulated. In many documentary films it is constituted at the level both of verbal address and of the specifically filmic address written into the image track. In the present context, however, I have considered only the work of the image track, and in specifying the operation of particular forms of documentary with regard to their modes of address have, for the sake of clarity in this initial exposition, discussed examples of that form of documentary which lacks direct verbal address: observational documentary.

At the same time, it is important to note the other sense in which the self-validating discourse of documentary may be considered to be complicit. This is the way in which the institutional, as opposed to the personal and immediate, conditions of production of documentary films are never the topic of such discourse. To point to this absence is to refer to a series of operations by which particular modes of representation have historically become a defining feature of certain meaning-producing institutions. I have, for example, referred here specifically to some of the ways in which certain categories of observational documentary, the ethnographic and the 'ethnoscience', may constitute themselves as part of an institutionalised academic discourse, that of anthropology. Perhaps of greater immediate import, in terms of its present status as the site of production and consumption of large numbers of documentary films, is the adoption and mobilisation by television institutions, precisely under the banner of documentary, of certain modes of representation: those which present themselves as a reflection and embodiment of the reality and truth of a taken-for-granted world; whose codes, that is, are denied. Once a metalanguage for documentary becomes available and it becomes possible to consider the ways in which different forms of documentary operate systems of

representation and situate the spectator by means of their mode of address, it will be of vital importance at the same time to locate these operations within the specificity of their contexts as the work of institutions of meaning-production. 83

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The Two Worlds of Marrakech

Liz Brown

Introduction

*Some Women of Marrakech*¹ is an ethnographic film made for television as part of Granada's *Disappearing World* series. It is unique in this series since it is a film about women, made by women. The film-makers, by virtue of their sex alone, gained access to people, places and events previously unfiled. This fact alone marks it off as having a special interest for anthropologists,² and it also evoked a strong response from television audiences who reacted favourably to this glimpse of a woman's world behind the veil and the high walls which surround the courtyards of Marrakech. The film seeks to explore the ways in which women deal with their lives in this private world away from the public world of men. In the public world women wear a jellaba and a veil, a tacit acknowledgement that they do not really belong in the wider society; both Mosque and State deny them access to rights in a society in which religion is a part of everyday life. In this particular cultural setting, the emphasis placed on women's solidarity in contrast to their exclusion from the public world of men allows for a reading of the

1 This is a more detailed version of a paper given at the 1978 British Sociological Association Conference. I would like to thank Chris Curling, Keith Tribe and Dai Vaughan for their helpfulness while I was writing this paper. I would especially like to thank Melissa Llewelyn Davies who generously shared her knowledge and expertise: without her comments and criticisms this paper could not have been written. This is not to imply, however, that the aforementioned share the views expressed, nor can they be held responsible for the conclusions drawn.

Production details and a shot breakdown of *Some Women of Marrakech* appear on pp 95-96 below.

2 The film was reviewed in *Rain*, the newsletter of the Royal Anthropological Institute n 19 April 1977 pp 7-9

86 film as bringing together the current interests of feminism and film.³

Some Women of Marrakech thus raises a number of issues. On one level, as an ethnographic film made for television, it raises the question of the production constraints and conventions specific to the *Disappearing World* series. It stands both as a reference to films made in the field by anthropologist film-makers, and more importantly as a textual instance of the television institution. Further, the convergence of both feminist and ethnographic forms of explanation allows one to categorise the film as 'feminist ethnographic' – a label also used by the director. To use such a label enables one to separate out the different strands and themes in the film. It is important to stress, however, that this label 'feminist-ethnographic' does not assume any essentialist notions of feminism or of 'ethnographicness'. Heider,⁴ for example, has deployed the latter notion as the basis for his reading of ethnographic films. In this case one ends up with an 'attribute grid' from which the ethnographic properties of a particular film can be simply read off. This tendency is not confined to anthropologist film-makers. It is often those films which purport to reveal the truths of women's lives which, by showing details of wife-battering or child-birth, are seen as truly 'feminist'. Here the 'attribute grid' rests with the privileged feminine (female) subject, and political statement is equated with the very process of revelation itself. The shock invoked in the audience is construed as a concomitant moment of politicisation; it is therefore insufficient simply to allude to these 'facts' – they must be seen in order to be believed. This view promotes some notion of what constitutes an essential property of a feminist film, but takes little account, for example, of historically specific forms of representation, nor of the implications of modes of circulation and distribution of films. *Some Women of Marrakech* is here being defined as feminist in relation to the orthodox concerns and forms of explanation of anthropology. Such a definition thus rests upon specific conditions of production and not upon any essential properties of the film *per se*. Whilst the film constantly deploys conventional ethnographic 'events' to motivate the narrative (the religious celebration, a wedding, an interview about forms of land-holding) the construction of the 'filmic reality' rests upon the over-riding themes of inside/outside = female/male = private world/

3 The film was reviewed favourably by *Spare Rib* n 56 March 1977 p 37

4 'The discussion . . . is ordered around several attributes which are common to all films, however ethnographic they may be. But each attribute has some value or values which are more ethnographic than other value or values. Each one is a criteria for judging the ethnographicness of a film. Taken together, the attributes allow one to make a profile description of a film, and they provide a basis for saying in what respects some films are more ethnographic than others.' Heider *Ethnographic Film*, University of Texas, Austin 1976 p 46

public world of Marrakech. The forms of organisation of the image and of the complex combination of sound and vision effectively sanction and render a feminist reading as dominant. 87.

The use of the phrase 'filmic reality' in apostrophes here is designed to emphasise that the forms of reality constructed in this film are diverse and not transparent; the justification for their use in this way lies in the general argument developed throughout this article that the ethnographic cannot function as a simple form of evidence for feminist arguments except under certain conditions. It should also be emphasised that this argument questions any attempts to call upon an 'ethnographic real' as the major basis for the construction of arguments concerning the social situation of women and the forms of oppression resulting from specific social relations. To subscribe to such a view would be to support the kind of empiricism with regard to sociological and historical evidence that has been repeatedly criticised in recent years. While ethnography can be called upon as written or filmed *exemplar*, it cannot function as *proof* – this can only be constituted discursively.

Some Women of Marrakech steps outside the boundaries and conventions of a film about 'people of other cultures' and makes a statement about all women – whether they be in Marrakech or Manchester. This aspect of the film has nothing to do with a construction of 'stereotypes' which then come to embody the general characteristics of a particular type, but rather it is a property of the commentary: we will see that the explanation carried by the commentary is informed by the concerns and interests of the Women's Liberation Movement today. It is the commentary that at crucial moments directs the reading of the image, and it is with the construction of this visual 'reality' that this article is concerned. It sets out to do two things. Firstly, the film is considered as part of a television series and as such is discussed in relation to the evolution of that series. In general it can be argued that *Disappearing World* began by dealing with 'people of other lands and cultures' in a journalistic way and subsequently moved towards a consideration of dominant world cultures in a manner more in keeping with ethnographic film proper. *Some Women of Marrakech* exemplifies this latter tendency. It will be argued that the common denominators of *Disappearing World* films can be located in the particular constraints of producing ethnographic films for television rather than in any common themes or style. Secondly, the article is concerned with the way in which a particular film – *Some Women of Marrakech* – works; how its forms of explanation are mobilised, the manner in which they are realised visually and aurally. Production problems are located in relation to the way both editor and director attempted to realise the dichotomies central to the film's narrative. It must be stressed that although no film can be simply reduced to the conditions of its production, there are moments at which a consideration of those conditions is crucial to an understanding of a film's

88 operation. This is particularly important when discussing ethnographic film, for it is only by introducing production constraints into the arena usually reserved for discussion of representation that one can begin to talk about film as evidence. It is precisely in the context of anthropology (and also of history) that film is routinely deployed as a form of evidence without reference either to its conditions of production or to modes of representation. For example, although there is often a marked difference in content between films made for anthropologists and those made for a non-professional television audience, the same filmic imperatives are at work in both cases. This paper seeks to explore such imperatives both at the level of the series and at the level of a specific film in that series – *Some Women of Marrakech*.

The 'Disappearing World' Series

The production of the series has now been brought to a halt; though no doubt, *Disappearing World* films will continue to be shown on television, no more films in the series will be made. This seems strange when one considers the continued popularity of the series. As the JICTAR (Joint Industry Committee for Television Advertising) ratings show, it was exceptionally popular. Moreover, it has been acclaimed by both television audiences and professional anthropologists; the films are much used in teaching and are sold widely abroad by Granada. The Annan *Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting* (1977) thought the series, along with *World at War* (Thames TV) *Rock Follies* (Yorkshire TV) and others, were on a par (in terms of intrinsic worth and prestige) with BBC programmes of a similar range. This kind of assessment is probably more important for the commercial television companies than audience size when they apply to the IBA to re-license. There can be little doubt that the *Disappearing World* series has played a crucial part in the commercial companies' attempt, after the Pilkington Report (*Report of the Committee on Broadcasting*, 1960), to make more 'prestigious' programmes in competition with the BBC. Since the series is networked it has had and doubtless will continue to have a wide field of distribution within, as well as outside, Britain. Given the popularity and public success of the series, one is then led to seek an explanation for its cessation in the production problems which it faced. In the *Sunday Times* (May 14th 1978 p 5) Peter Lennon points out that during the period in which the series concentrated on 'primitive tribes' union manning rules were modified, because it was accepted that a small crew was necessary to maintain the confidence of the people being filmed. Thus, crews consisted of director, camera operator and sound recordist, with no overtime but time off in lieu. Lennon suggests that

a decision to concentrate on urban dwellers, particularly to make a programme about slum dwellers in Brazil, precipitated manning problems. It was argued that as the series no longer concentrated on 'primitive' peoples, the argument for small crews did not apply. Consequently the production assistants insisted that they be included in the crew for a proposed Brazilian film. The producer of the series was recalled from Brazil until a satisfactory arrangement could be worked out with the ACTT. Lennon implies that since extra finance could have been made available to resolve the manning problems, given Granada's growing revenue from advertising (from £4,526,000 in 1977 to £6,310,000 in 1978), the conflict was actually about sharing of revenue within different departments rather than union demands. As he points out, a serious, minority series like *Disappearing World* is more vulnerable to extinction than programmes like *Coronation Street*. Apart from the production problems specific to the series, it can be argued that in general there is an increasing tendency in television documentary towards on the one hand a more journalistic approach, and on the other to a convergence with drama. Although the *Disappearing World* series – as its title indicates – began by dealing with threatened peoples in a manner which raised current and dramatic issues (*Last of the Cuiva*, *War of the Gods*, *End of the Road*) the series became progressively more ethnographic in its attempt to introduce a broad sociological framework into films about particular cultures and peoples. This process was probably reinforced by growing acclaim from professional anthropologists, but it clearly shifted the series from its original orientation and removed it even further from the increasingly popular journalistic documentary model.

Even though the series has gained recognition from professional anthropologists, there are quite marked differences in terms of production between ethnographic films made by anthropologist film-makers in the field, and ethnographic film made by television crews. The amount of time spent in the field means that anthropologist film-makers can develop what have been called 'observational' techniques of filming. An anthropologist film-maker, moreover, does not have the same limitations of programme length and can very often include in the final film most of the footage actually shot. In fact shooting ratios vary considerably: Granada crews work on average with a 15:1 ratio, which is not high for television film, but Jean Rouch,⁵ for example, has claimed a 2:1 ratio in his films. Programme length also places specific constraints on ethnographic film-making for television. The *Disappearing World* series films are now between 51 minutes 30 seconds and 52 minutes in length. This is directly related to programming constraints. The earlier films

⁵ Jean Rouch works alone in the field, showing and discussing the films he makes with the people themselves. Cf *Principles of Visual Anthropology* ed Paul Hockings The Hague 1975.

90 in the series were shown after *News at Ten*, and so could be longer. When the series moved to a prime slot at 9.00 pm, however, the time limit was determined by the 10.00 pm start of *News at Ten* so that 52 minutes became the standard length. This limit has its own effects in the finished film, since only one or two themes can be explored. In the case of *Some Women of Marrakech*, for instance, many of the issues raised by the film could not be dealt with adequately in 52 minutes. On the other hand sometimes material is not sufficient to maintain interest for almost an hour, and what could be interesting in a 20 minute slot is stretched to its limits.⁶ For anthropological film-makers constraints tend to be financial rather than temporal, though the two are not unrelated. It was an important aspect of the series that a good working relationship between director, crew and anthropologist was necessary. Again this can pose specific problems for television crews, since an anthropologist working alone is able to establish contacts and the confidence of the people he or she is filming alone. Many anthropologists spend months making films and can deploy techniques and approaches to filming which are not viable for television crews. The necessity for a good working relationship connects with the specific problems of making ethnographic television film and to the practicalities of making a film in weeks rather than months or years (six weeks was the usual length of time spent on location filming). The anthropologist is able to introduce the crew to those being filmed, and the contacts and friends he or she has established are crucial if the film-makers are to do more than paint a thin picture of people's lives. There are of course problems associated with the film-maker/anthropologist relationship and some anthropologists come to see the finished films as misrepresenting their fieldwork.⁷

The fact that *Disappearing World* films are made for a television audience has important consequences for the way in which material is presented. It cannot be assumed that the audience has any prior interest in watching the films, nor any specialised knowledge of the type of events to be portrayed. Comparison of ethnographic films made primarily for professional audiences with similar films aimed at the non-professional indicates that those concerned in the production and exhibition of such films are well aware of the limits of permissible and comprehensible content for each type of audience. The implication of television here foregrounds the issue of selectivity and censorship: the category of television audience operates *per se*

6 For some remarks on a film's optimum length, see Dai Vaughan 'Space Between Words' *Screen* v 15 n 1 1974 pp 83-84

7 As for example in the case of *The Kirghiz of Afghanistan* televised in December 1975. For a discussion from an anthropologist's point of view of the making of a film in the *Disappearing World* series, see Andrew Strathern 'Making "Onka's Big Moka"' *Cambridge Anthropology* special issue 1977 pp 32-46

in the exclusion or modification of certain signifieds. For example, a recent *Disappearing World* film about pastoral nomads did not actually show the way that the young camels are bled – blood being a staple food for the group: the information was instead given verbally. Other factors are also relevant when we consider the insertion of ethnographic film in the television institution, and here the appropriation of field data to the visible, to spectacle, is crucial. Rituals and ceremonies present themselves as eminently filmable not least because the people involved in them are, by virtue of their roles in the events already, to a certain extent, acting. The events of everyday life are always the hardest to represent and it is no accident that many ethnographic films focus on the most colourful and exotic moments. Rituals and ceremonies not only have a structure and intrinsic interest which makes them the stuff of ‘exciting’ film-making, but they have also traditionally been crucial areas of interest in anthropological theory. In taking account of a non-professional audience the *Disappearing World* series had to engage with the effects of television exhibition in producing readings which would seize on the texts as spectacle. This was anticipated at the level of production by attempting to be sensitive about representations of events which, though normal for those involved (such as the drinking of camel’s blood), could be rendered violent and exotic when presented with the force that visual imagery allows.

The use of subtitles is relevant here. Since the use of subtitles has been one of the defining characteristics of the *Disappearing World* series it is pertinent to raise certain points about their use within the context of the production of ethnographic film for television. Subtitles allow intonations of voice and statements implicit in sound and gesture to be communicated without being overridden by the intervention of a middle class accent.⁸ It can of course be argued that such an intervention nonetheless takes place at the level of the spoken commentary – as we will see in the discussion of *Some Women of Marrakech*, commentary works crucially in guiding the viewer through ethnographic film. Such issues are the subject of debate for anthropologist film-makers partly, it seems, because of a tendency to overestimate what can be achieved on the level of theory through the use of film as a medium. Since the aims are voiced in terms of notions of ‘understanding’ and ‘interpretation’, film tends to be discussed in terms of communication rather than representation. One of the immediate effects of subtitles is that they effectively alter the image, rendering it as image with caption, which has consequences for the way it is read. Further,

8 Hugh Brody’s ‘Seeming to be Real: *Disappearing World* and the Film in Pond Inlet’ provides a useful review of a film which does not use commentary and comments on the commentary/voice-over versus subtitles debate. *Cambridge Anthropology* op cit pp 22-31

92 the interactions and responses of spontaneous conversation tend to become flattened out in subtitles. It cannot be assumed that a summary of the words spoken is necessarily the message received by the audience, nor indeed that it is even necessary for the audience to know what is being said. If subtitles add to and complement what is being seen then the emphasis on them tends to deny the specific effectivity of the visual image. This use of subtitles is related to the notion that ethnographic film sets out to explain and render accessible to a television audience an otherwise unfamiliar culture. Subtitles both summarise and disjoint the spoken word. The continuation of subtitles can even out a sentence which is spoken and then revoked: this is most apparent in interview sequences. To use *Some Women of Marrakech* as an example, when one of the main characters, Aisha, is interviewed about 'women of the troupe' – professional dancers who have compromised their honour – in the subtitles her replies appear to flow evenly though in fact the interview was cut. Aisha's edited response to the question is more revealing than her unedited reply would have been. However, the subtitles effectively disguise this fact of editing.

All the films in the series are based on a particular working relationship between director and anthropologist, all involved six weeks filming on location and budgets of between £30,000 and £50,000 per film, and all assume a non-professional audience. Since the films within the series exhibit a diversity of subject matter and form attempts to view them as undifferentiated constituents of a television series can have unfortunate consequences. For example, a letter in *Rain* (n 18 February 1977 pp 14-15) makes some important points about the way in which social anthropologists review film, concentrating for the most part on content and ethnological 'correctness'. I would disagree, however, with the conclusions drawn by this contributor that an ethnographic film made for television is stamped as a 'fancy piece of television entertainment', a view which I hope this article will serve to undermine. It is tempting to allow the notion of the television film to override an examination of the specificity of the films themselves, and it is equally tempting to see them as entertainment or as popular television. Whilst it seems necessary to discuss conditions of production of the series at a general level the way in which such a discussion can relate to a notion of specifically televisual modes of representation, of a 'television reality' is not immediately clear. The wide and diverse distribution and use of the series (for example *The Peoples' Land* about Eskimos of Pond Inlet, is now being used by the Eskimos in their fight to reclaim land rights from the Canadian Government), can be said to be in contradiction with the notion of a 'flow' of 'television reality' and renders a discussion of these films far more complex than would be possible if they were simply subsumed under the heading of 'films made for television'. Whilst it is important to take account of the prestigious/serious factor and the

entertainment element in the way in which the audience is constituted, the analysis presented below will attempt to show that any reduction of *Some Women of Marrakech* to these constraints simply limits the lessons which may be drawn from it.

The Film: 'Some Women of Marrakech'

I

Like most of the other films made for *Disappearing World*, *Some Women of Marrakech* involved about six weeks of actual filming. The crew went to Morocco twice, the second time to film a wedding and also to get some shots of the streets and men at pavement cafés which were lacking in the first set of rushes: these were used for the opening shot of the men sitting at a pavement café, crucial to the establishment of the public/private world dichotomy which constitutes the main theme of the film. The problems of capturing the atmosphere of the streets and public places that the film-makers encountered relate to the film in two specific ways. Firstly, the immediate problem for the anthropologist of carrying out fieldwork in a city raised general difficulties for all those concerned with the film. Secondly, both director and anthropological consultant wished to emphasise the inside/outside dichotomy which they saw as central to the consciousness of Islamic women. Various technical devices were employed in order to realise this dichotomy in film terms: the film's opening sequence provides a limiting case (see II below). Both director and editor employed the introduction as a short-hand summary of the problems and issues raised in the film. For the director it served as a way of orienting the viewer, sketching in the men's world and establishing the basic dichotomy of the film. The editor used this form of introduction as an 'instinctive procedure', a device used to announce the film employing a few strong contrasting shots to bring out the oppositions, tensions and dominant themes of the film.

'Such a device can usually be justified in showbiz terms as "grabbing the audience"; but it may have the more interesting function of investing certain key images with a quasi-symbolic significance which will pervade the subsequent material and, without infringing its autonomy, enable it to be perceived as the mode of discourse upon its subject.'

In obtaining suitable footage, film-makers face problems similar to those encountered by any anthropologist engaged in fieldwork. Although in a city there is a wide range of material available, it is

9 Dai Vaughan 'Skeleton Diary of a Cut' *Editor's Manual* National Film School 1977 p 5

94 enmeshed within the multiple webs of urban life. Moreover, the problem is not simply one of finding favourable fieldwork environments; the filming process imposes its own imperatives. These are overlaid by a further set of constraints operating in the process of editing. Although the ethnographic film in its purest professional form avoids editing other than as a necessary mechanical device for joining pieces of film, when the ethnographic is inserted within the context of television documentary, an already established series of editing conventions which operate to guarantee intelligibility to, or to limit the range of readings open to, the non-professional audience is brought into play. An instance of this from the production of *Some Women of Marrakech* arose when the editor decided to edit one sequence within these classical conventions in spite of the fact that he would have preferred to employ less conventional techniques in an earlier sequence which would have drawn attention both to the artifice of the editing process and the actions of the leading character. The latter would have been followed through a continuity of action which would have allowed the other characters present to shift about in a non-continuity of action. Though this would have worked well in certain sequences, the key final sequence in the film – the wedding – was thought to demand the classical conventions of parallel action, complementarity of eyeline, point of view shots and unbroken music in order to cohere the combination of simultaneous events (see IV below). The editor therefore decided that the use of unconventional devices in the earlier sequences would disturb the context in which the ‘conventional’ devices would later appear, and consequently had to seek other means of achieving the desired sense of the earlier footage. It is important to pay attention to the specificity of the editing process: not least because social anthropologists tend to approach ethnographic film as a ‘faithful record’, simply a pictorial representation of field-notes, employed as evidence in an analogous fashion to field-work in the discipline of social anthropology. It is evident, however, that the process of narrative construction in which the editor inevitably becomes involved undermines many of the notions of documentariness and ethnographicness that are implicit in discussions of ethnographic film. This also has implications for the often naïve faith of the anthropologist in the veracity of ethnography, in which the process of writing itself is conceived as the constitutive moment of ethnographic reality. As mentioned above, the emphasis that ethnographic film places on ceremonies and rituals is in part a product of the constraints of film-making in unfamiliar surroundings. What is clear, for example, about *Some Women of Marrakech* is that explicitly social events are required in order to provide convincing footage: thus we have the emphasis on the wedding and the religious ceremony. Whilst it may indeed be easier for the anthropologist/film-maker to obtain a better coverage of the stuff of every-day life in the village situation, the problem nevertheless remains.

Production Details of 'Some Women of Marrakech'

95

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| First screened | 26th January 1977 |
| Production | Granada Television |
| Director | Melissa Llewelyn-Davies |
| Consultant | Elizabeth Fernea |
| Editor | Dai Vaughan |
| Camera | Diane Tammes |
| Commentary | Marilyn Gaunt |
| Sound | Gill Shepherd |

Presentation of the Film

| <i>Shot</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|-------------|--|
| 1-2 | General introduction showing map and long shot of Marrakech with relevant information. |
| 3-5 | Introduction to the outside, public world of men - camera shows approach to city gates then side of a pavement café in the main square of Marrakech. |
| 6-13 | Introduction to the women's world; a party where women dance, chat, enjoy themselves and entertain each other. |
| 14-18 | A visit to the local steam baths, an important event in women's lives - a woman is seen preparing to go out putting on her jellaba and veil. |
| 19-23 | Out on the streets of Marrakech a woman is under a 'special licence' as it were; her jellaba and veil function as a 'portable house'. |
| 24-26 | Interview with four wealthy women. They chat about their lives, what they do all day, and about the troubles of one of them, a 'co-wife' who, along with the other wives, has been deserted by her husband for a younger woman. |
| 27 | A man walks into a room with a young boy. The commentary gives general information about the law relating to the equal treatment of co-wives. |
| 28-30 | Interview continues. |
| 31-32 | A woman prays in seclusion and relative quiet. |
| 33-39 | Introduction to Aisha as she prepares food in the courtyard she shares with six other families. We are given general information about her poverty, the jobs she has had, etc. |
| 40 | Interview with Aisha in which she explains her desire for a house of her own. |
| 41-46 | Aisha and her friend from the courtyard go to the market to buy material from a distant cousin of the latter; Aisha haggles aggressively and gets her bargain! |
| 47 | Shot of the market, camera pulls back to reveal the marketplace in Marrakech. |
| 48-59 | All-women's religious celebration, where women excluded from the public world of the mosques and religion worship their own saints. An analogy is drawn here between these cults and the non-conformist religions of British history which also appealed to those excluded from the wider society. |
| 60-61 | Interview with Aisha about her ideas of womanhood and <i>shaykha</i> (professional women dancers). |
| 62-64 | Professional troupe preparing for a show - introduction to Hajiba, a friend of Aisha's. |
| 65-66 | Interview with Hajiba, who explains the circumstances which forced her to become a professional dancer. |
| 67-70 | Hajiba and the rest of the group perform for a male audience, the women sing and dance and the men play musical instruments. |

| | | |
|----|---------|--|
| 96 | 71-73 | Aisha again in her courtyard preparing food, talking to neighbours who live in the courtyard. |
| | 74-78 | Aisha and her friend visit a <i>shuwafa</i> (a fortune-teller), as many women often do in Marrakech, to talk over their problems. |
| | 79-86 | Aisha is interviewed in her village and describes the forms of landholding of her family, mentioning the pieces of land owned by her sisters, and the land she owns which is worked by a nephew. |
| | 87-91 | Mina, the bride in the wedding to follow, is having a henna party, where her female friends and relatives gather. |
| | 92-93 | Next morning Mina is prepared for her wedding, is made up and dressed in a variety of outfits. |
| | 94-109 | Men's and women's events brought together; men in the downstairs room and women upstairs; men are entertained by <i>shaykha</i> whereas women entertain each other. |
| | 110-123 | Procession of bridegroom to mosque; bride led into bridal chamber; consummation of marriage and the exhibition of the bloodstained bloomers. |
| | 124-130 | The bride has her own party with female guests, and ends her wedding celebrations, as they began, with her own sex. |
| | 131-134 | A little girl in a Koranic school recites a prayer; then the whole class repeat it over the final credits. |

II

At the very start of the film we are introduced to the world of Morocco just as we are introduced to all the other 'worlds' in the series. The flow and dissolving of the images of a series of unfamiliar faces and the music that accompanies this visual journey are typical of the associations the term 'ethnographic film' suggests. There is a familiarity in these opening credits which nevertheless promises a journey into different lands. But it is the series of ever-dissolving faces which summarises the film's *raison d'être*: it is the 'people' themselves who form the subject matter of such films. The zippy cutting and split images of the *Nationwide* credits (to take a relevant comparison) contrast sharply with this flow of facial statements. Following the opening credits the globe and the map, another of the conventions of the series, appear.

In *Some Women of Marrakech* the opening shots are as follows:

| Shot | Time* | Description | Commentary [Sound] |
|------|-------|---|---|
| 1 | 19 | 'Olde Worlde' map of Morocco in full frame; slow zoom to Marrakech on map. | Morocco lies on the western edge of the Islamic world, washed by the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. |
| 2 | 16 | VLS of city: man drives cart away from camera. | [Noise of ox and cart.] |
| 3 | 20 | LS of city gates of Medina, camera position on tripod in middle of road. Slow zoom to city gates. Man on moped drives towards camera, sounds horn, drives round it. | In Marrakech the public places belong to the men [sound of horn]. Men feel at home in the streets, the businesses, the mosques and cafés, |

* In these tables shot times are given in seconds.

In the first shot of the film the map is overlaid with a commentary which gives relevant information in the form of geographic and historical facts. The camera and commentary move together in unison. One of the received conventions of documentary has already been signalled – the privileged status of the commentary. This is particularly crucial in the construction of the 'reality' of *Some Women of Marrakech*; in general the commentary gives 'neutral' information – facts, dates, times and places, functioning to orientate the viewer and acting as a guide through an otherwise unfamiliar series of images. Shot 2 is a postcard-like image, but not of the 'traditional' Marrakech of the tourist industry. In many ways there is nothing outstanding in these first two shots – they can be read within the conventions of the series as simply introducing the theme and place of the programme. These first shots of a 'traditional' Marrakech are however crucial in establishing an emphasis which though not explicitly stated, underlies the rest of the film.

During the approach of a man on a moped driving towards the camera another piece of 'information' is given about Marrakech, encompassed within the flow of the previous facts and apparently of the same order. The commentary tells us simply that 'In Marrakech the public places belong to the men' – and hence the 'fact' of patriarchy, of a public world of men, begins its life – confirmed by the actuality of the visual image.



1



2



3

From this point on the feminist and ethnographic forms of explanation interact and reinforce each other, though it is the commentary which sanctions the feminist statement. The examination of the 'shift' in the form of explanation from shot 2 to shot

98 3 is illustrative of this. However, it would be doing a disservice to the film to argue that the form of explanation is solely verbal. I want therefore to offer two further illustrations of the way in which a feminist statement is made, in the first case through the commentary, and in the second by the forms of meaning inscribed in the visual image alone. The film's main theme is, as has already been mentioned, that of the dichotomy: inside/outside world. In order that the lives of the film's central characters, Aisha and Hajiba, could be explored in relation to it, the dichotomy had to be established in the first few shots. Further, the narrative movement is motivated by the continuous shift between inside and outside, private and public, family and strangers. The links are made verbally and visually, and it is in shots 4, 5 and 6 and those immediately following that the dichotomy is firmly established.

| <i>Shot</i> | <i>Time</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Commentary [Sound]</i> |
|-------------|-------------|---|---|
| 4 | 18 | Walking-track down side of pavement cafe where men in MS/MCU sit idling, chatting, watching. Men at front look to camera, some cover their faces. | places where they mingle with strangers as well as friends. Men are expected to be sensitive to slights upon their honour and |
| 5 | 11 | Concealed cut; track continues. Fast pan across figures of men grouped at end of café. | in public they cultivate an air of aggressive virility. Women belong where they will not be gazed upon by strange men, |
| 6 | 36 | Camera follows woman in MS as she gets up to dance then takes position of guest watching women dance. | [Music continues from shots 6 to 13.] in private courtyards behind the high walls of the houses. Women are subject to their decisions. Every family in Morocco is jealous of its honour |
| 7 | 6 | MCU profile shots of two women. | an honour that is determined by its men in the public world |
| 8 | 17 | MS of woman in 6 dancing. | and by the chastity of its women. Women are thought, at least by men, to be sexually irresponsible by nature |
| 9 | 9 | MCU of 4 women -- 'profile' shot. | the merest whisper of gossip which casts doubt on a woman's virtue threatens the family honour, so women must manifest their innocence in a visible way to the outside world. They should never meet nor have contact with men from other families, |

| Shot | Time | Description | Commentary [Sound] | 99 |
|------|------|---|--|----|
| 10 | 9 | Camera follows woman with tray as she hands it to another woman. | | |
| 11 | 9 | Concealed cut continues movement in 10 with second woman, who passes tray to guests. | so women give parties for women and the guests entertain each other. | |
| 12 | 4 | MS woman in 6 dancing. | | |
| 13 | 10.5 | MCU of woman dancing amongst group of women seated around her. Pan to MCU of children playing, and to guests around them. | [Music builds to a climax and ends.] | |



4



4a

In shot 4 the apparently continuous track past the pavement café is a direct confrontation, the 'look' reversed (in documentary terms, that is to say, to 'viewer' not to camera). The techniques and skills of *cinéma vérité* camera-work are deployed to the full. The men filmed respond directly to the camera, unprepared subjects of the filming process. Without the commentary this shot is open to many different readings. Some men, reacting to the ability of the camera to 'capture' their image, cover their faces: others look embarrassed, though they continue to look into camera, following its movement down the row of seated men; one man stands up and gestures to the camera, others just look blank. What the commentary does is twofold. On the one hand, it interprets these reactions as part of the public hostility and aggression of men – 'in public they cultivate an air of aggressive virility'. On the other hand, these statements are generalised. They are not about particular men but about all men in the public world of Marrakech. These men thus become representatives of men in general, and in a metonymic movement this one short sequence establishes the wider society by lifting the image from the specific to the general.

The women in the private world (shot 6) also react to camera, reinforcing the 'naturalism' of the previous shot. As the commentary states that 'women belong where they will not be gazed upon by strange men' the camera gestures with a single, sweeping movement into the world behind the high walls that surround the court-

100 yards. This gesture of the camera is a look which is able to see both 'worlds' and to move effortlessly from one to the other. This overview of sound and vision establishes the viewer's privileged position; it is the peculiar ability of the cinematic apparatus to enable one to see more than those at whom we look. The women's world is then entered with a prior knowledge of the men's world (from which these women are excluded) and as the music of the party begins we enter a world of warmth and non-hostile acknowledgement of the camera's presence. Further, the use of the music internal to the image plays a crucial role, throughout the film, in conveying the atmosphere of the 'inside' in contrast to that of the 'outside': in a way it is as simple as the equation: music=inside, traffic noise=outside. It has been argued that the use of natural sound (the noise of the actual people and places) helps to make an ethnographic film a more 'revealing' one – and hence 'more ethnographic'. However, it can be seen (and heard) that in this film music versus traffic noise actually creates in large part the radically different atmospheres of the 'two worlds'.



8



9

The viewer is seeing some women of Marrakech as only their closest family members and other women see them, without the veil and free to dance and enjoy themselves with no fear of discrediting their honour and that of their families. In this inside world, the technical construction of the gaze (camera angles, position, places of subject) is very different from that of the men's world. From shot 6 to shot 7 the form of representation of the image is radically altered, the 'blur' of the fast pan preceding the cut into the women's world providing the space for the transformation of the position of the viewer.¹⁰ Simply, men are filmed looking directly to camera as unprepared subjects while women are filmed in profile, and, when they do acknowledge the camera, they do so with amusement. The significance of this in terms of the issues

10 The term 'viewer', like that of 'audience' is not being used here or elsewhere in the paper in a sociological sense in which references are made to a person or persons as receivers of meaning. This paper consistently tries to demonstrate how both 'viewer' and 'audience' are in fact constructed within the television apparatus.

with which the film is implicitly attempting to deal, and this is a component of its feminism, is that of women presented as spectacle, as object of the gaze. The image of woman as belly-dancer, as sensuous and earthy, is constantly repeated. Woman as entertainer of men and woman as entertainer of other women, these are oppositions which the film explores, and no more so than in the wedding sequence. Men *do* look at women differently and the film confronts the viewer with this in a way which makes obvious and clear those differences which have perhaps only been glimpsed before. The viewer becomes part of these oppositions, for the men's look is also to camera. Whereas the men were objects to be observed, lined-up as it were, disunited and alone or in small groups at the pavement cafe, the women are framed by their spatial relationships with each other; the camera moves *with* the women and 'sits down', moving to see the dancer at the party. Women's close and tight spatial relationships express their emotional relationships with each other and this is stressed and maintained in the framing.

It is in this first glimpse of the women's world that the image/symbol of belly-dancer is established; especially powerful, when combined as it is with a commentary which though understated in its presentation is punctuated and underlined by the undulations of the music paralleling the movements of the dancer. Although it addresses the role and status of the family, the commentary is framed by an emphasis on women's sexuality, which is reinforced by the image of woman as belly-dancer. The importance of this image cannot be understated; it pervades the film. A central character, Hajiba, is a dancer, and women dance for each other at nearly all of the events we see. This image already has explicitly sensual connotations, as has the idea of the harem 'behind the walls'. But from the beginning these belly-dancing women are not treated as alienated objects of the gaze. The first glimpse of their sexuality is in relation to other women – in the next sequence we see women at the steam-baths where they find their sense of self in their relationships with other women. The relaxed, uninhibited and sensual atmosphere of the women's world contrasts sharply with the view we get of Hajiba dancing for men. For Hajiba dancing is a job which brings her dishonour and makes her a social outcast. The conventional sexualised connotations of the image of the belly-dancer are made contradictory by this treatment in the film.

As already mentioned, the introductory shots are crucial in establishing the existence of the inside/outside opposition, and this has consequences for the form of 'reality' realised in *Some Women of Marrakech*. One of the key images introduced into the narrative in shots 1 and 2 is that of a 'traditional' Marrakech. This foregrounding of the traditional ensures a consideration of and concentration on the problems of women's lives in a Muslim state where they have few rights and no political influence. The shot of the city gates (shot 2) is in fact of the gates surrounding the Medina

102 (the old part of Marrakech where Moroccans live) rather than of the new, modern French-built town full of Europeans. However, the notion of a 'traditional' society is itself a problematic one, for it denies the complexities of social change in its posing of one 'type' of society against another. The commentary and the early shots play a crucial role in maintaining the dominance of this key image throughout the film. They combine, for instance, in an attempt to suppress such visual evidence of modernity as the bikini-lines evident at the steam baths, or the wearing of mini-skirts. This is largely an effect of the role of the commentary in ethnographic film where the viewer is guided through a series of otherwise meaningless images, unfamiliar and largely unknown. Just as a Tupperware Party has no visual logic of its own if presented as a roomful of women busily engaged in buying plastic boxes, so with the parties and ceremonies of Marrakech. This is not simply a matter of the content, for what one is dealing with is documentary film, where unlike non-documentary forms, the viewer has a position in regard to the image prescribed not by the aesthetic codes written into a particular fiction film, but by the supposed analogical relationship which the documentary presents itself as having with reality. In one sequence (shots 41-46) for example, the camera awaits the arrival of Aisha and her friend as they go shopping in the market. Two possible readings could be derived from this, differentiated by whether or not they are made within the semantic system of current *cinéma vérité*. The first implies that this 'shopping trip' was staged for the camera by virtue of the coincidence of camera and subject; the second implies that the shopping trip was so regular that the arrival of Aisha at this time and place was predictable:

'Anyone who reads the shot within the semantic system of current *cinéma vérité*, where the former is assumed to be permissible, will absorb the latter as part of its meaning. This will be avoided only if we can create a context wherein the function of this choice of camera-position will be to generalise the sense of the shot from "Aisha goes (=is going) shopping" to "Aisha goes (customarily goes) shopping". If I use this shot, I must be sure to set it against commentary which is itself general in statement.'¹¹

Commentary and image are brought together so that shots are read both within current 'conventions' of documentary usage and within the particular semantic system in which the film operates.

III

One of the most dramatic sequences of the film follows an interview with Hajiba in which she tells of her reasons for becoming a dancer. In the interview Aisha sits next to Hajiba, and her presence,

11 Dai Vaughan, 'Skeleton Diary of a Cut' op cit p 3

by now well established, serves to authenticate Hajiba's statements: side by side sit a woman, Aisha, who holds dear the traditional Islamic ideals of womanhood, and a dancer in a troupe, Hajiba, a woman who has compromised her own and her family's honour. The beginning of the interview is as follows: 103

| <i>Shot</i> | <i>Time</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Subtitles</i> |
|-------------|-------------|---|--|
| 60 | 67 | Aisha interviewed in profile MCU. | <i>Question:</i> What's the best kind of life for a Moroccan woman? <i>Answer:</i> A woman should pray to God and observe our religion. She should follow our customs and shouldn't go out uncovered. She shouldn't gossip, or try to set evil on other people. That is how a woman should live whether she lives in Marrakech or in the countryside. |
| | | Slow zoom to CU of Aisha. Aisha nods in response to the question. | <i>Q:</i> What about women who appear in public as dancers? |
| 61 | 59 | Concealed cut CU Aisha. | <i>A:</i> A dancer is someone who has left her family, she has no man to support her and no money. She has no clothes and no shoes and nothing good to put in her stomach. She says 'ugh' to life because she has no-one to care for her. She has to live somehow, she has to earn money. |

What is immediately noticeable about Aisha's statement is that it is contradictory; her ideas of respectable womanhood in the first part do not tally with her comments about 'women of the troupe' (professional dancers) in the second. However, the statements are given a unity by the person of Aisha herself who, though respectable, has been presented as a sympathetic person who herself experiences material hardships. More significantly, however, it is important to note that the subtitles give a continuity to the interview, although it is in fact cut just after the question about professional dancers. Further, Aisha's statements are general ones, they serve to introduce the professional dancers that we see in the next sequence, shots 62-64. (At this point we do not know that Aisha and Hajiba are friends and that Aisha's cousin himself leads the professional troupe of which Hajiba is a member.)

The viewer is then introduced to Hajiba with a prior knowledge of the general hardships which force women to compromise their honour; our view is therefore a sympathetic one which is reinforced by the established 'good faith' of Aisha herself.

| 104 | Shot | Time | Description | Commentary |
|-----|------|------|---|--|
| | 62 | 45 | MCU of Hajiba pulling her costume on over her head. Slow pan along the line of the group of men and women cramped together getting ready for a show. | Hajiba and her companions are dancers or <i>shaykha</i> in a group led by one of Aisha's cousins. They perform around Marrakech and in the nearby villages. The women sing and dance and the men play musical instruments. |
| | 63 | 63 | MS of Hajiba and group; slow zoom to MCU of Hajiba as she puts on part of her costume; slow pan along line of dancers/musicians to man with violin extreme right of frame, in MCU; CU of violin as he tunes it ready to play. | In the busy season for weddings they may be working six or seven nights a week. Professional musicians are a necessary part of the most important social gatherings. But <i>shaykha</i> – women of the troupe – inevitably compromise their reputations because they perform in front of strange men and come to be looked on as women of easy virtue. Their freedom from the usual restrictions are regarded with |
| | 64 | 21 | MS low angle shot of men in group sitting on the floor; pan to left of frame to Hajiba as she puts hairgrips in a make-up bag. | awe for <i>shaykha</i> have the power to harm a person who offends them by performing a special dance which casts a spell upon him. But this power does not protect them from dishonour and what's more by dishonouring themselves they bring shame upon their families. |

By showing the dancers preparing for a show in the cramped surroundings of the room (which opens onto a courtyard) huddled in a group trying to put their costumes on and get ready, it is made clear that there is no glamour attached to this life. Throughout this and the subsequent scenes of the group performing, the MS and MCU serves to convey this cramped feeling – the frame, like the room, is crammed with people. Unlike the scenes in the courtyard with Aisha there is no LS or MS which would permit a view of a total space. Since in shot 62 there is no view of the audience, the space may be understood as a dressing room. The emphasis on the little things, the tuning of an instrument, the putting away of hairgrips, the adjustment of a sleeve, all underline the spatial tightness and tedium of preparation for a show.

From this sequence there is a cut to an interview with Hajiba in which Aisha plays an important role in vouchsafing Hajiba's 'story':

| <i>Shot</i> | <i>Time</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Subtitles</i> | 105 |
|-------------|-------------|---|--|-----|
| 65 | 78 | MCU of Hajiba and Aisha, H. nearest camera looking slightly to its left. Hajiba speaks. | It's something I had to do, I had no choice. I do it partly because of my little brothers and sisters. I wanted them to stay together in our village. I didn't want them running round after my father died. If we leave our land it's like there's no trace of us left. My dancing helps the family to stay together. I gave up my health and everything. | |
| 66 | 126 | Cut to BCU of Hajiba. | Q. Hajiba you know what people in Marrakech say about dancers, not all of them are good women – are they? A. The day my father died my elder brother said in front of everyone at dinner that I must leave! He threw my belongings out into the street, even though I'm separated from my husband. He didn't want me around. He said 'Our father kept the family together. Now he's dead so go away and find your own place to live!' People told him to let me stay where my father had left me. He didn't listen. He threw my things into the street. The next day I gathered up my things. I left the village and came here to Marrakech. Some months later he came after me with a knife. He threatened me and said I was ruining his reputation. He told me to get out of town. I was lost. I had nowhere to turn. | |
| | | The interviewer says something to Aisha, the latter nods and replies; Hajiba continues, interrupting. | I've had no luck in this life except in my mother. I didn't choose this path. | |
| | | Pull back to include Aisha, and Hajiba in MCU. | They say I'm doing this and that, but God knows that I've done nothing bad. | |

Hajiba weeps and puts her hand to her face to wipe her tears. Aisha takes her hand.

Interviewer. I'm sorry Hajiba.

Hajiba continues to weep.

Aisha. God willing everything will turn out all right.

Aisha and Hajiba hug each other warmly, they kiss on the cheek and Aisha comforts her friend. As Hajiba sobs, interviewer speaks to Aisha who apparently replies.

A woman without a man and without money has to do whatever she can.

This interview is one of the outstanding moments of the film which embodies all of the feelings of solidarity, closeness and warmth of women's relationships with which the film is concerned. It works as an interview because it presents and represents the three women (Aisha, Hajiba and the interviewer) as united in their common understanding of the hardships which women alone in Marrakech face. The interviewer is obviously sympathetic both in her tone and in her one subtitled statement: 'I'm sorry Hajiba' – this is important as a signal of the close feelings amongst the women. Clearly much of its authenticity has to do with the fact that through the conventions of the *cinéma vérité* interview we are seeing 'before our eyes' a woman of Marrakech telling the 'truth' of her life. Aisha nodding agreement with the interviewer, Hajiba's presence in 'profile', the presence of the interviewer off camera but nonetheless evidently committed to the problem of these women.

With Aisha's last statement in the interview, and with the sound of Hajiba's sobs there is a sharp cut into a BCU of Hajiba as a dancer – the image is combined with music to which she moves her head. This shot, following immediately after the interview is a startling one: in context, Hajiba's expression is readable as one of pain and emotional stress. Were it not for the music of the group this shot might stand as an intimate insight into the sorrows of her life. No commentary links this shot with the interview, and the emotional, intimate atmosphere of the last shot of the interview is neither lost nor undermined by preceding a scene of Hajiba's dancing and singing. Our ties with Hajiba and her role as important character are maintained by the BCU. As transition from the specific to the general it encapsulates the sorrow of Hajiba's interview whilst at the same time allowing the transition to be made. There is no commentary throughout this sequence (shots 67-70), it is presented as a visual summary in its own right. In it we see not

only the dancers but also the audience; we now realise that the group's changing room is in fact also the room where they are about to perform and they are being watched by groups of men sitting on the floor and lined up in the courtyard. The use of MCU and MS again creates a feeling of being cramped; the spatial relations between people are mediated by the tightness of the rooms' boundaries and their proximity to the camera. 107



67



68

Again the men are looking more or less directly to camera, but this time it is the reverse angle of Hajiba's look – we see as she does a group of men and boys staring, some bemused, some merely interested, but all grouped together staring at her and her fellows.

| <i>Shot</i> | <i>Time</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|-------------|-------------|--|
| 67 | 8.5 | BCU of Hajiba as she moves from side to side in rhythm with the music, as it starts up. |
| 68 | 24 | MCU low angle shot of men sitting on the floor to right of frame watching Hajiba, they are clapping in time to the music and her movements. Camera tilts up to include Hajiba and the group; Hajiba is singing and dancing; the others in her group push round her trying to find enough space to perform – they all move nearer camera which is apparently positioned in the middle of the room between the group and the men lined up in the street. |
| 69 | 14 | MCU of one man in audience, he looks vaguely bored and pulls his eyelid and picks his nose. Pull back to MCU of him and men and boys around him; slight pan to his left. |
| 70 | 5 | Low angle shot of Hajiba, MLS from position of man sitting on floor; Hajiba finishes her song and smiles adjusting her outfit, seeming not quite sure of herself. |

This section of the film (shots 60-70), coming as it does at the beginning of the second half, is itself an introduction. Not only is the viewer introduced to a new character, Hajiba, but a new image of women is presented. Hajiba, unlike Aisha, is not a respectable woman in terms of the conventions and mores of Marrakech. The lives of women in the 'outside' world – outside the family, outside respectability – are looked at through the character of Hajiba, and the already established key image of woman as dancer acquires a new dimension. Hajiba dances not for pleasure, as do the other women we have seen, but for money. Entertainment for her has a different meaning, one far removed from the notions of enter-

108 tainment of the 'inside' world. In dancing for men Hajiba has compromised her honour, whereas in dancing for women she could only have expressed her own enjoyment and sensuality. This theme plays an important part in the wedding scene, a moment at which the oppositions previously stated are clarified and reinforced and Hajiba's acceptance of and friendship with Aisha furthermore underlines the theme of women's close social relations. Aisha's crucial role in the narrative and the forms of her introduction situate her as a representative of all women in her position. Aisha offers Hajiba a support which the latter cannot find in a male world which is harsh to her. The women's world then, embodied in the persons of Aisha and Hajiba, is presented as one relatively free of tensions and conflict. What tensions there are, such as Aisha's gossiping neighbours, are presented as products of a male-defined society in which poverty prevents the realisation of the ideal of family seclusion.

IV

An illustration of the argument presented in this article is provided by the wedding sequence near the end of the film. In this case an orthodox ethnographic 'event' is overlaid with a commentary which effectively confirms the privileged status of the feminist reading. Men's and women's worlds are brought together, literally under one roof, and classical conventions of documentary (point of view shots, parallel action and eyelines, music in 'real' time) maintain the coherence of an otherwise disparate set of images. As we will see, each cut is motivated by a look, gesture, commentary, or a standard point-of-view shot. A coherent space is established in which the viewer is orientated in relation to the two worlds embodied in the two parties – the men's (downstairs) and the women's (upstairs). The wedding restates the already established inside/outside, private/public dichotomies in a sequence (shots 87-130) which is heavily marked as the dramatic finale of the film. The invocation of the wedding signals the resolution of the ethnographic narrative while simultaneously foregrounding the theme of women's sexuality at various levels – visually as belly-dancer, as object of the gaze in the men's world; aurally via commentary, conversation and sound internal to the image.

The concern of anthropology proper would be with the preparations for the wedding, ie social and economic transactions such as the form and amount of the dowry, the processes involved in choice of Mina as wife and interactions between the bride's natal kin and her affines. Although such points are alluded to (Mina's henna party, the fact that she is marrying an electrician from the city – her mother's brother's son – and is happy to be living near her mother) the two wedding parties are developed to provide the filmic space for the elaboration of the male/female opposition. This

is realised at a number of different levels. Hajiba, by now a well established character, is present at the wedding with her troupe. Although she is hard to spot in the film, she has come to represent dancers in general, so that identification may be made with all women of the troupe whether or not Hajiba herself is specifically recognised. The key image of the belly-dancer is deployed in the different contexts of male and female worlds so that the movement from one space to another represents, and parallels in spatial terms, the private/public division. As in the opening shots of the film the 'hostility' of the male world of the street café is strongly evoked, with men sitting alone or in pairs, framed singly in close up or in small groups. Shot 5 for example, could be encompassed within the opening tracking shot of the café (shot 4) without disruption. Upstairs, the women frame the bride within the film's frame; there are lengthy close-ups of Mina and details of the wedding preparations are shown; the close-ups of men show them staring blankly, either directly to camera or disinterestedly out of frame. The visual unity of the women's world then serves to represent the unity and solidarity between women. Downstairs women are in a world apart, their social distance from the women dancers with whom they share spatial proximity makes the situation of the *shaykha* even more striking. Although they appear to be having a 'good time' Hajiba's earlier testimony of her life undermines this appearance. One man makes a grab for Hajiba's breasts, a woman is placed on a small table and dances to order (shot 101); two men seated on the floor stare at a dancer's belly. Though enjoying the spectacle they appear slightly embarrassed by her gaze as she turns to camera and directs her look to an audience now participating in the men's world. In the following breakdown of shots 92-109 we will see how the contrast and convergence of the two worlds is realised. In the editing, parallel action, complementarity of eyelines, point-of-view shots, shots motivated by a look or verbal gesture, are mobilised to this end.

| Shot | Time | Description | Commentary [Sound] |
|------|------|--|---|
| 92 | 21.5 | BCU of Mina (bride) being made-up by her female friends. | ['The following day' (over shot 91)] at about ten p.m. the bride is taken to an upstairs room in a house rented by the groom. This is the night when the marriage will be consummated. The ceremony celebrates the bride's change of state, the loss of her virginity as much as the marriage bond itself. Throughout the evening she is dressed in the variety of outfits which make up her trousseau, but she is only on show to her female friends and kin. Downstairs |
| 93 | 22 | MS of Mina as friends dress her, moving around her and arranging her outfit. | |

| 110 | Shot | Time | Description | Commentary [Sound] |
|-----|------|------|---|---|
| | 94 | 5 | CU of seated man looking up at man joining him to sit beside him. | in the courtyard the friends and relatives of the groom are arriving to celebrate the occasion with |



92



94

| | | | |
|----|-----|--|---|
| 95 | 6 | CU of man looking blankly to camera, pan to his right to another man seated and similarly framed. | a party men and women guests are separated at this stage of the proceedings but men |
| 96 | 7.5 | CU of two men seated on floor in 45 degree profile; man on left of frame talks to someone out of frame, both are smiling. | don't dance for each other and they are entertained by <i>shaykha</i> . |
| 97 | 9 | Dancer left of frame foreground in MCU, camera just below her eye-level takes in two men and others seated along wall. The two men watch her belly-dance for them, smiling sheepishly; she turns her gaze from them to camera, continuing her movements. | [Throughout next shots music, clapping, ululating continues.] |
| 98 | 15 | Dance troupe with Hajiba left of frame in MS, crowded together dancing, singing. | |



97



99

| | | |
|----|----|--|
| 99 | 29 | Upstairs. Pan from MLS of Mina surrounded by |
|----|----|--|

Shot Time

Description

Commentary [Sound]

111

100 11

two lines of women guests; pan across to two women leaning into room on window ledge, they talk to others in room, look briefly at camera; pan back to shot of Mina laughing.
Shot from balcony across to other side, people lean over watching dancers below; tilt down to dancers.



100



100a

101 22

Downstairs; dancers observed from above camera now at their level. Aisha moves across frame, man makes a grab for Hajiba's breasts; a man with hands to mouth shouts to people above and a scarf floats down to be tied round the neck of a dancer who is standing on a small table.



102

102 7

Upstairs; Woman in blue standing in middle of two rows of women adjusts her hip scarf dancing to music; looks over her shoulder off-frame.

103 4

Woman on table similarly dances, moving her hips in

| 112 | Shot | Time | Description | Commentary [Sound] |
|-----|------|------|---|---------------------------|
| | | | a parallel motion to dancer in 102. Dancer in MS, man clapping standing frame left. | |
| 104 | 15 | | Upstairs; woman (as in 102) continues dance; she goes to walk out of frame as a woman walks past her. | [Music stops momentarily] |

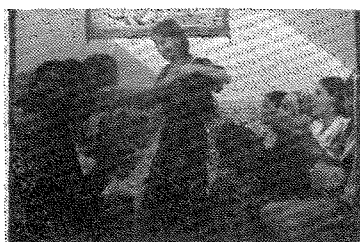


105

| | | |
|-----|---|--|
| 105 | 6 | Downstairs; shot of troupe and guests, camera slightly higher than eye level; violinist centred with banknotes in hat as people around him clap, he jumps up and down as music builds to a climax. |
| 106 | 4 | <i>Shaykha</i> in MS dances looking up off-frame. Woman dancing facing her right of frame. |



106



107

| | | | |
|-----|----|--|--------------|
| 107 | 5 | Upstairs; woman pulls a friend on to the floor to dance. | |
| 108 | 10 | Man in 98 framed again left, troupe sings and music builds to climax. Man right of frame, slightly to back, as in 101, shouts to someone on balcony. | |
| 109 | 22 | Upstairs; as in shot 99. Move into CU of Mina. | [Music ends] |

Thirteen of these shots (97-109) carry no commentary even though they formulate a complex set of statements about the men's and the women's parties, but by this time, of course, many of the images are familiar. More importantly the position of the camera provides its own commentary since by virtue of its role in the interchange between upstairs and downstairs it effectively stands on and establishes the *boundary* of the two spaces/worlds. This can be illustrated with reference to shots 99, 100 and 101: from the point-of-view shot (100) across the balcony, virtually a reverse of 99 and the tilt down to the courtyard below, observing from above the scenes already shot from the courtyard (shots 97-98). The camera's role in this spatial interaction is further motivated by the look off-frame and by the shout (cf. shots 101, 102, 106, 107) addressed from the men's to the women's world, which, in hailing the latter, foregrounds the distance between them. In shot 96 for example, we descend to the courtyard and see men looking up, reaffirming the distinction between the two zones while uniting them in a look while a scarf floats down to be tied on a dancer by two men. We then cut back to upstairs, where a woman gets up and is dancing for other guests; first we see her from behind (shot 102) and then she turns and looks past camera. On this we immediately cut to the downstairs party again (shot 103) where increasingly frenzied dancing surrounds the camera. Shot 106 cuts to one of the female dance troupe, framed on her own looking up towards the space of the women's world; the calmer world of the women's party is entered as one guest pulls another to her feet. Shot 109 completes this series of uncommented shots with a shot which is almost a replica of 99. This stage set of bride-framed-by-guests can be said to represent the solidarity of the women's world. The sharp, quick cutting which accompanies the building musical climax of the party is calmed by the longer shots of the bride, the close-ups and slow pans to Mina. In the women's world all spatial relationships are clearly positioned; it is the pan from bride to guests and back again to bride, the pull back to full view of bride and guests, which constantly restates a visual closeness and solidarity. Downstairs, on the other hand, men and women move about the room in an unstructured manner, at times close together, at others singled out, apart. In this 'male' space relationships are haphazard and have no internal logic apart from that imposed by the entertainer/audience relationship. This is a property of the framing and of the fact that the camera always looks down from the women's world upon the world of men. In the sequence the women's world has the overview, as the balcony shot of the troupe (shot 100) illustrates. Moreover, just as the particular conventions of editing deployed in this sequence have repercussions for the rest of the film, so if the initial device of constructing the male/female opposition had not been firmly established, this sequence could be read as no more than an effective rendering of two connected wedding celebrations.

Commentary comes into play at the point at which the visual images are no longer self-explanatory; the wedding takes on a less familiar form, both in terms of images and actual proceedings. Events leading up to the consummation take on a more 'exotic' quality as the bride is led to the bridal chamber to await the groom. Subtitles signal the different attitudes of men and women as they await the successful completion of the consummation. As the women sing 'Oh. What happiness on this day, my sister, my friend' the best man leads the awaiting crowd in a chorus of 'Victory! Victory!' Apart from the interview with Aisha and Hajiba, most of the statements women make about their lives and attitudes to men and to other women occur in the form of songs or chants which are subtitled. The sounds of the party, music, ululating, clapping, are deployed to provide a 'real' time background and to underline the visual image. As the parallel action of moving hips in shots 102-104 takes place both women are surrounded by a clapping audience. In the crowded frame of the men's party this lacks the gentler quality of the clapping of the women's dance, it becomes yet another of the claustrophobic boundaries imposed by men upon the *shaykha*, and by implication upon all women. The position of camera upstairs means that action takes place around it, it is part of the social interchange of dancing, smiles and friendly gestures. Downstairs dancers move about in front of the camera so that as in shot 103 they are looked at and the camera is not acknowledged. This differential interchange between viewer and viewed is marked as our closeness and identity with the women's world is reinforced on entering the bridal chamber itself. Mina and two friends smile shyly in their acknowledgement of the camera's presence; here one sees a response quite different from that of the men.

The sequence of the wedding party finishes with the camera's movement into the space of the bride and guests to a MCU of Mina; the frenzy of the dancing ends, as it began, with a shot of the bride, calm and smiling throughout. Whilst the party shows Mina surrounded by fellow women, the commentary takes over as she is led to the bridal chamber. Mina the woman is now presented as Mina the bride, awaiting her groom. The commentary gives details of the proceedings once again in an 'objective' manner. We are told near the end of the sequence:

'When she marries, a woman crosses the boundary between two families, her father's and her husband's. Her position is ambiguous and potentially powerful. So, the defloration of the bride is made much of. Every wedding re-enacts the drama of men's control over women's sexuality and fertility. Virginity becomes a public matter to be demonstrated to the whole world.'

The procession to Mina's mother's house exhibiting the bloodstained bloomers underlines, to a western audience, the ethnic veracity of such an analysis of marriage for women in Marrakech. However,

even though there is something 'exotic' in such actions, and in Mina's doll-like appearance as she is led out to receive gifts from her female friends – ending the event as it began with members of her own sex – Mina is also part of a changing world. This world, like our own, requires that women go out and find employment. For women like Mina and Aisha the threat of poverty forces them to leave the traditional world and ideals. It is stated by the commentary that in fact the 'psychological independence' from men gained in the traditional all-female world will serve women well in the public world of men. Here there is a contradiction, with which the film attempts to deal, between the positive portrayal of women's solidarity and the social relations of which this is a consequence. However, such a contradiction could remain contained within the ethnographic event of the wedding as marking the film's end. That it does *not* do so decisively privileges the feminist reading, and shifts the film outside the boundaries of an ethnographic discourse, marking the film as 'feminist-ethnographic'.

V

It is significant that one reviewer (*Rain*, op cit) reacted by seeing the film-makers as at the same time 'horrified' and 'envious' of women's lives in Marrakech. However, the paradox is rather to be seen as an aspect of the boundaries set up by the inside/outside dichotomy, which is reinstated as the dominant discourse in the final sequence (shots 131-134) in which a little girl recites a prayer:

'In the name of God the compassionate, the merciful/Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient/In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful.'

And so, the association of women with male domination is forcibly stated as the prayer continues, recited by the whole class, over the credits. This provides the clearest statement in the film of the form in which the women's world is constituted. It also emphasises that the main argument of the film is a feminist one, drawing on the issues and concepts raised by the Women's Liberation Movement, although relying on the ethnographic format to provide a guarantee of 'truth' and reality of the feminist argument.

The subordination of ethnography as a simple form of evidence to a feminist argument should nevertheless not be taken as a derogation of the film's significance as a feminist/ethnographic statement. There are, it is clear, a number of points at which the film offers no particular position or argument. Thus, for instance, while we are informed that Aisha has to go out to work and that her husband is an unskilled labourer, we never actually see her or anyone apart

116 from Hajiba and the fortune teller at work outside the home. Or again, while the film as a whole revolves around a distinction between the public world and the private world, women are never seen with their families (husbands or children) in the context of the private/inside world. The representation of Marrakech as a male-dominated society fails to differentiate between distinct levels of that society. Whereas early on in the film a group of wealthy women are presented as sharing common ground with Aisha, it is quite clear that the 'world' that they inhabit is distinct from Aisha's. It is these gaps of insufficiencies, however, which permit the undifferentiated patriarchal world of Marrakech to be constructed as a means of conveying certain arguments within the limitations of time and audience in the *Disappearing World* series. The film *per se* cannot be read as evidence for the existence of a 'real' patriarchal world without encountering quite serious limitations and qualifications. This must be stressed, given that the use of the term 'patriarchy' in many contemporary discussions goes no further than a simple conception of male rule over females. The apparent lapses in the film, where this inside/outside, female/male association fails to adequately mesh, are the effects of the inadequacy of the concept of patriarchy as a principle of organisation and explanation in the film.

For an anthropologist, the uni-dimensional representation of the social relations in the film would appear to be a defect: there are allusions to the status of women as property-holders, the exchanges constituting the wedding are hinted at, and the role of women in the family is illustrated in the case of Hajiba, but none of these is developed. In the case of Hajiba this underdevelopment is marked: the difference between brother as sibling and brother as head of household is decisive in her life, since it is the latter who excludes her from the family: but for the inside/outside, female/male world, social distinctions are obliterated by distinctions of gender. The use of a patriarchal model, signalled from the beginning in the commentary, to organise the film means in effect that the ethnographic material that is deployed is subverted, since the use of this model renders opaque the complexity of kin relations and forms of property holding. This, as well as other professional criticisms of *Some Women of Marrakech*, tend to foreground its status specifically as television. For example the commentary in such a context operates to motivate an ethnographic image which, within the constraints posed by television programming and a non-specialist audience, must of necessity operate at a general level. Television ethnographic material in a 'culture' slot implies an injunction to make the world presented intelligible.

The all-woman crew were permitted entry to places which had never before been filmed. In fact the 'inside world' is in many ways a discovery, in film terms, made by the makers themselves. This has two consequences: it enables the programme to be advertised

as particularly exotic and interesting precisely because of this 'discovered world'; it also rather paradoxically means that the footage taken in the 'inside world' is 'real ethnography' in the anthropologist's sense, since it is material previously uncollected. It might be argued that the film works to place this 'inside world' within a larger social framework, subjecting it to an analysis that breaks down previous stereotypes of 'women of the harem' as sexual creatures divided among themselves. It is this analysis which marks one of the points in the feminist form of explanation, in that it inscribes the argument that conceptions of women prevalent in Western culture are constructed by men, and only accepted by women by virtue of the continued dominance of men over them. This is stressed in the closing sequence where the recitation of this domination is placed in the mouth of a little girl who is being 'taught' the statements by a male teacher. The process of 'revelation' of reality which is inscribed in the ethnographic notion of the film is undercut by the commentary which states the nature of the inside/outside world in terms of a concept of patriarchy. The reason for this could be said again to be related to the specific character of the film as a television programme, in which the address of the film itself is maintained firmly by direction and motivation from the voice of a (female) commentator. However, when this commentary is read as one to an *ethnographic* film, problems arise in that it seems to fail to provide the information which would usually be expected of such a film.

It may be suggested then that the feminism of the film resides to a great extent in the visual evidence offered for the general statements of the commentator. For different audiences, however, the relation between commentary and image is divergent, and it must be noted that any simple appropriation of the image as evidence for the words of the commentary fails to take proper account of the ambiguities of the film-text, and also neglects to consider the limitations imposed on the construction of the film by its conditions of production.

This article has attempted to take account of such limitations and constraints in a consideration of how a particular film works as both ethnographic *evidence* and feminist *statement*. The points of convergence of the feminist and the ethnographic are, as we have seen, problematic; in order for the ethnographic to function as a form of visual evidence for the feminist statement the 'real' events are summoned to the aid of a male/female dichotomy. It is at this point that anthropologists site the film's weaknesses. However, far from signalling the limitations of a feminist statement, the film highlights the inability of such ethnographic moments to act as a vehicle of interpretation; other cultures cannot simply be transmitted along a neutral conveyor belt. As many ethnographic films and monographs illustrate, anthropologists have been well practised fence-sitters. It is therefore to the credit of *Some Women*

118 of *Marrakech* to have taken a position in relation to its subject matter explicitly informed by a concern for the liberation struggles of all women. The two worlds of Marrakech can then be sited in two differentiated readings of the film as well as in the dichotomies internal to the film itself. It is important to stress that the film raises issues of representation and evidence which cannot be dismissed as residing either in its feminist or ethnographic elements. It is clear that any film which attempts to undermine conventional stereotypes of women is in danger of constructing counter-arguments which produce yet another mode of classifying women as uniform female persons. To a certain extent *Some Women of Marrakech* falls into this trap. This article, however, has been concerned to illustrate that the reasons for this are complex and cannot simply be placed as residing in its feminism. It is only by considering the film in relation to its production constraints that such reductionism can be overcome; in this way the combination of 'feminist-ethnographic' can then be understood as constituting a specific form of argument within a particular institutional setting.

Some Women of Marrakech and the other films in the *Disappearing World* series are available from: The Scottish Central Film Library, 16 Woodside Terrace, Glasgow G3 7XN.

Films are distributed within the UK only and a full list of films available on hire can be obtained from the above address or: The Royal Anthropological Institute, 36 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NG.

Hogarth, England Home and Beauty
 Two Recent British Films and the Documentary Ideology

Noël Burch

It is a truism that throughout the viscissitudes of British film history, the documentary film, and more important, of course, the ideal of the documentary film, has held a privileged place.

In the first decade of cinema's history, G A Smith, Hepworth, Williamson among others laid the basis of what were to become the dominant representational cinematic codes. Pragmatically these may be defined as that set of basic rules which almost all film-makers working inside the *cinematic institution* (as defined by Metz) have interiorised as a 'natural language'. This set of rules emerged as the generalisation of a number of ideologically and symbolically *symptomatic strategies*: linearisation of the visual and narrative signifier, production of haptic space, generation of a spatio-temporal continuum, constitution of the cinematic persona. The films of Smith et al had their thematic origins in music-hall, penny-dreadful and nursery lore which made them distasteful to most middle class adults. At about the same time the American entrepreneur Charles Urban with the collaboration of the Lumières' master cameraman, Mezguich, was perpetuating the non-centred, non-directive, *presentational* system of the Lumière street scenes, in films which almost alone among the earliest productions, met with the immediate approval of the middle class, both in England and in most film-producing countries:

'In my opinion, the Lumière brothers had correctly defined its [cinema's] rightful domain. The novel and the stage are more than sufficient when it comes to peering into the human heart. The business of cinema is scenery, the dynamics of life, the manifestations of nature, the stirrings of the crowd. The camera's lens is like the spectator's eye: open to the world.'

Felix Mezguich, *Tours de Manivelle*, Paris 1932, p 38.

120 Mezguich may be regarded as a founding father of the documentary ideology, and his prudish contempt for the popular cinema of his day clearly indicates *a contrario* the class origins of that ideology:

'The fairground clientele demanded acrobatics, facile, simplistic adventures full of gunsmoke and unimaginative conflicts involving the stock triangle of the vaudeville theatre: the husband, the wife and the lover. The fact that from the very beginning cinema had been entertainment for the whole family was totally forgotten.' (ibid)

The replacement of the Lumière model by the mode of representation implicit in Smith's close-ups, Williamson's reverse fields, Mottershaw's chase structures and Hepworth's 'concertinas' was, however, to prove at least as necessary as the 'uplifting' of subject matter. That this in itself was not enough was demonstrated by the failure (c 1908) of the *Film d'Art* experiment which strived to recreate on the silent screen the codes of the bourgeois theatre before the system of representation which was to achieve this had become operational. Seating comfort was also improved to bring the 'better classes' into the cinema to see 'story films'. Yet from the very outset, the prestige of the 'reflection of the world' was strong enough to overcome, to a degree, the repulsion for the conditions of presentation and the 'intolerability' of confusing and all too panoramic views.

When the innovative work of those British pioneers was already totally forgotten, effaced by the accomplishments of the American masters and their commercial triumph over European competitors paralyzed by the effects of war, when in short the British cinema has entered its first historical decline, *The Secrets of Nature** series continued nonetheless to occupy a discreet but universally respected niche on the world film-market. Even after Hitchcock, the one innovative master of between-the-wars British cinema, had written off his early 'experiments' and set his sights on California, the GPO unit continued to guarantee British cinema a place in the history books, providing as it did a culturally respectable presentation for the social-democratic workerism of the depression 30s in the by then polished moulds of Pine- and Holly-wood. This dominant cinema was only superficially lampooned by Grierson in his genteel, reformist translation of the Vertov's scathing materialist denunciation of 'the cinematic skin on a literary skeleton':

'The studio films largely ignore this possibility of opening up the

* *Editorial Note.* The *Secrets of Nature* series was started in 1922 by H Bruce Woolfe. Mary Field soon took over their production for British Instructional Films, directing some of the films herself. Some of them are described in *Secrets of Nature* by Mary Field and Percy Smith London 1934. Cf also 'Interview: Ivor Montagu' *Screen* v 13 n 3 pp 76 and 110

screen on the real world. They photograph acted stories against artificial backgrounds. Documentary would photograph the living scene and the living story . . . We believe that the materials and the stories thus taken from the raw can be finer (more real in the philosophic sense) than the acted article . . . Add to this that documentary can achieve an intimacy of knowledge and effect impossible to the shim-sham mechanics of the studio, and the lily-fingered interpretations of the metropolitan actor.¹

That founding certificate of respectability delivered to Urban and other early exponents of the documentary ideal deserves serious reflection, considering in particular that it has continued to be delivered to the *idea of documentary* as manifested in guises extraordinarily at variance and even at odds with the Lumière model, from the GPO simulacra of 'live' observation, obtained through the means of the classical fiction film, to the very differently 'live' look and sound achieved through the modern technologies of reportage. Even among the films of the Nazi era, our liberal critics have been far more tolerant of Riefenstahl's polished contributions to the Documentary Ideal than of, say, *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933), as if somehow the stylish documenting of a fiction called 'the Nuremberg Congress' was more respectable than the *mise-en-scène* of a political morality because the pro-filmic material was 'real'.

The traditional bourgeois fascination with the *replica* as a means of symbolically extending property goes a long way towards explaining the otherwise paradoxical success among bourgeois audiences everywhere of those early actualities. And of course, in a society where philosophical positivism continues to be not merely the dominant but indeed the hegemonic intellectual framework, where reformist and technocratic delusions, associated with a uniquely 'gentlemanly' set of ground-rules for the class struggle, provide the basis for an ideological and political consensus unrivalled in the capitalist world, it is easy enough to see the reasons for the exceptional prestige still surrounding today an idea of film whose very denomination embodies 'objectivity', 'dispassionate observation', and in short 'the end of ideologies'. (Currently, of course it also embodies 'heartfelt pleading for a cause': there is a place for Speakers' Corner in the Documentary Ideology.) All this, however, is a matter of broader concern, which cannot be explored here.

Nor, I am afraid, can I go much further towards a rigorous definition of the Documentary Ideology. I would simply suggest that however heterogeneous the objects which it embraces, its manifestations have in common one absolutely irreducible characteristic

1 John Grierson, 'First Principles of Documentary' in *Film: a Montage of Theories*, ed R D MacCann New York 1966 pp 211-212 (first published in *Cinema Quarterly* 1932/4)

122 which I would be tempted to posit as the *ideological essence* of the Documentary Ideal: a documentary is a film which is identifiably not a 'fiction'. This may seem an unbearably tautological statement but is it not clear that even today, as in the time of Urban and Mottershaw, the exclusion of 'disreputable' fiction is the key to a certain *respectability* of the Documentary Ideal? Indeed, documentary films, in the bourgeois view all have in common something akin to that which is shared by those books in an (English language) library which are not novels or collections of short stories, and which enables them to constitute that wonderfully hybrid but infinitely *respectable* entity known as *non-fiction* (which has succeeded in giving poetry and even drama a status apart from and implicitly superior to that mass of alphabetised fiction in which Emily Brontë and Carter Brown are such easy neighbours). This history of cinema – and especially of the English and American cinema – has shown that the respectability of the documentary was predicated on its *separateness*, on the fact that it was not to be confused with anything else that might be . . . not documentary. I might further suggest that the inability of orthodox criticism to deal with the later Vertov (especially *Man with a Movie Camera*) as well, I feel, as with the Franju shorts² (the fact that his very conventional feature-length films have so completely effaced that supreme body of early work is emblematic here) or with the experiments in French television in the late sixties known as *l'Écriture par l'Image*,³ are largely due to an inability to cope with the breakdown of a category vital to the ideological economy of bourgeois thought about film.

Now the historical role and place of the documentary in Britain have been such that the concept and the practice, the codes of representation and of spectator expectancy attached to it, are understandably the object of contempt from certain British critics and film-makers. From further afield living in France, however, it does seem important for both British film-makers and critics to come to grips with a phenomenon of such historical weight if the rethinking of film-related practices in this country is to develop on all necessary fronts. This task seems possibly even more urgent if we turn to the 'documentary on art', that sub-category particularly plentiful in this country, and which adds to the documentary's general aura of respectability that very particular kind with which a society that has long ceased to provide nourishment for any really significant artistic creation will tend to surround the idea and accoutrements of art.

Two recent British films which, if only by virtue of their mode of

2 *Le Sang des Bêtes* (1950), *Hôtel des Invalides* (1953), *Le Grand Méliès* (1953), *Monsieur et Madame Curie* (1954)

3 Extremely sophisticated combinations of the 'documentary' and 'fiction' approaches in dealing with questions of a sociological nature (class relationships, contradictions of a 'free press', etc)

financing (both are Arts Council productions) belong to this privileged category, also nonetheless imply, each in its own way, a critical stance towards the modes of the 'documentary' and the 'documentary as art' as the history of recent film practice has produced them. Though in no way avant-garde films, in no way related to that *tabula rasa* which seems to constitute the only way that so many British critics and makers have found of satisfactorily 'setting their arm-chairs facing in the direction of History'.⁴ I feel that in view of the need for English film-makers to examine the backwater in which history has placed them, it would be useful to dwell briefly on two films which attempt to do just that, which attempt, from inside a highly coded practice, a new look at the presuppositions of the 'documentary on art', as well as at some of the ideological pre-suppositions of the society which has given it value. The major mode of the documentary on figurative art – traceable, I believe to Continental sources, films made by Henri Storck eg *Le Monde de Paul Delvaux* (1945) and above all Luciano Emmer and Enrico Gras⁵ – has consisted in exploiting the possibilities offered by the institutional mode of representation for decomposing/re-composing the figurative elements of a painting in such a way as to *linearise* them in quasi-narrative manner (this of course was the decisive step taken by Griffith and his contemporaries towards constituting this mode and away from the panoramic multi-centric views of the Lumière model).⁶ Resnais' *Van Gogh* (1948), using and abusing the possibilities of lateral and axial camera movement to literalise the painter's strategies of depth representation as well as to dramatise the figurative signs through the ordering of montage, may be taken here as exemplary.

Hogarth (1977)

With regard to this mode of discourse, Edward Bennett's film *Hogarth* takes a very clear and salutary stance. Often enough, a painting or engraving may occupy the screen alone, so that the perspectival attitude coincides with that which the institutional mode has accustomed us to seeing on the screen, and in such instances we do indeed 'enter' the representational world of the artist. I would take as a particularly potent instance the long, silent

4 J P Sartre to A Camus *Les Temps Modernes* 1954

5 I have always felt, however, that in some ways, *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) inaugurated the model of this type of film with the editing of such *pictorial* scenes as the ceremony in the Huns' camp, presented first as a rigidly composed tableau, then 'animated' by the presentation of successive details

6 eg *Racconto da un Affresco* (1946), *Il Paradiso Terrestre* (1946), *Legenda della Croce* (1948/9)

124 presentation of *The Reward of Cruelty* (a criminal's corpse being dissected) an ironic contrast with a text by Hogarth protesting against cruelty to animals in the streets of London. At no point, however, is an effort made to linearise the signifiers of a given tableau, to 'story-board' the painting or engraving. On the contrary, ironic allusion is made to this traditional approach in two or three instances through extremely rapid pans across a fragment of this or that previously presented image in shots so brief and so fast-moving that they absolutely cannot join up with any master shot according to established modes of editing, but produce on the contrary a jarring effect of superfluity, of 'excessive' signification.

If we examine other moments at which the paintings or engravings are presented full-screen, as representational worlds in themselves, we will always find that great care has been taken to set this effect at odds with another mode of discourse, so that the third term, the *resultant* of this confrontation, is to produce the painting as real, flat, contemporary object, object of *value*. I will cite only two of the more significant instances: the slow tracking shot towards the window of a print-shop which appears to end in a full-frame view of a print called *A Midnight Modern Conversation*, satisfies, up to that point, the programmed expectation, peculiar to the documentary on art, that we be *agreeably drawn into* the artist's universe. Irritatingly unexpected (in the terms of the desire aroused by this genre) the end of this shot, in which the engraving is suddenly removed from the frame to reveal a glimpse of a transaction inside the shop, does more, I feel, than simply re-inscribe the artwork in a market economy: it turns the whole discourse of the art documentary inside-out, suggesting that the spectator envisage the rest of the film (this shot comes early on) from a point of view critical of that dominant critical discourse of *penetration*.

Another interesting example of this type of disruption (but in the opposite 'direction') occurs when, after a fairly long, full-frame presentation of *The Pool of Bethesda* (one of a pair of monumental canvasses) – and we must remember that in our historically constituted view, such an image on the screen subsumes a perspectival 'box' receding seamlessly from the edges of the frame – a nurse passes quickly through the frame, so that the developing illusion of depth inherent in the post-Renaissance mode of spatial representation is suddenly collapsed back to the surface; and this collapse is followed by a long situational shot which shows the painting hung on a landing in a hospital while a minute episode of the 'slice-of-life' persuasion develops down the stairs, further emphasising the objectiveness of the painting on the wall above. At the same time, the totally isolated and *truncated* quality of these scenes has, I feel, a symmetrically dissolving effect on the slice-of-life mode itself, which appears thus briefly throughout the film in many forms, often only loosely related to the main discourse as defined by the Hogarth texts read in voice over. Nor is the

imbrication of these images 'complete' either; they simply seem to branch out of the 'subject' in various associative ways; and while I have lumped them under the ideological heading of the 'slice-of-life', they in fact belong to a good many categories of the Documentary Idea. They range from the Industrial Documentary (replete with a decorative 'abstract shot' of spinning copper drums, recognised, typically, only in the following shot as functional objects) to an audio-visual pun which brings the film tangentially close to the codes of the narrative film as such, and by which a present-day executive type, with his elbow on a rich-looking chimney mantel, is identified with an 18th century patron to whom an off-screen voice is heard reading a letter from Hogarth. These deliberately sporadic allusions to a whole series of documentary or quasi-documentary models are what to my mind extends the scope of the film beyond a simple meditation on the 'film as art' to the whole of the ideological space which constitutes the documentary, calling into question its essential homogeneity. And what seems to me the film's culminating shot is one which precisely acts as an emblem of these several axes of reflection – the camera is placed next to the auctioneers' table at Sotheby's. The edge of a painting up for sale occupies one edge of the frame, buyers and spectators are visible in the background. The space of the shot, recalling both the depth-producing power of classical painting – and of the screen – as well as their surface nature, is in a relation of tension with the decentered (and thereby all the more eminently 'live') quality of image and sound.

This auto-reflexive project does not avoid, however, some of the problems of working within the highly coded discourse of the film on art. For example a second scene of the industrial documentary type, showing the printing shop of a modern newspaper in association with a reference to Hogarth's newspaper activities, seems to revert to the redoubling, illustrative mode of traditional documentary, possibly due to the irrelevant irony of the headline glimpsed – 'Mockery of Rape Sentences'; though no doubt fortuitous, this demonstrates the degree to which the control of the flow of signification is indispensable in this type of endeavour. Similarly, the cut from a full-framed shot of an engraving to a wider shot in which a very severe-looking guard is posing beside the 'valuable' painted version of the same image seems a somewhat univocal comment on the Museum. To a joke of this sort, I much prefer the pan across rows of post-card reproductions, some of them wrong way up, with the visual ambiguity dispelled only at the end of the sequence when a thumb covers a large section of what had seemed like a full-sized picture.

This recent film, which I regard as Christopher Mason's best so far⁷ – far superior, in particular, to his one narrative feature film, *All the Advantages* – has been a kind of booby-trap for the Documentary Ideology:

'A treat for nostalgia addicts . . . a feast of atmospheric props.'

'A beautiful kaleidoscope of gorgeous furniture, rugs, rooms and houses . . . an impeccable tour of the artefacts of the Thirties.'

I quote these journalistic reactions ironically, because *England Home and Beauty* has in common with Bennett's *Hogarth* that it is not 'about' its ostensible subject in the way that the Documentary Ideology would have documentaries 'be about' things. Mason's film, like Bennett's is 'about' the documentary in general and the art documentary in particular. But even more importantly, it is about ideology and history in ways quite intolerable to, and therefore unreadable by the British cultural establishment. I will cite one more journalist:

'*England Home and Beauty* offers the pleasures and frustrations of walking round a marvellous exhibition without a catalogue.' (Italics mine)

This is more revealing. Because of course, one of the best established models for the art film is precisely that: the exhibition-with-catalogue, the 'pleasure of the eyes' paired with the 'edification of the mind'. And the frustration referred to here (with I suspect only feigned relish) clearly designates a *sense of lack* which provides one key to this complex film.

In examining the architectural and decorative styles of the 1930's, Mason develops, in fact, two contradictory discourses (and in this, of course, he is defeating the essentially monolithic project of the Documentary Ideology, much as Franju was doing in *Hôtel des Invalides*). One of these is perfectly readable from within the confines of dominant ideology (at least it has become so since the re-evaluating/re-valuing implicit in the nostalgia craze). This is the discourse of Style: the stylish editing and stylish *mise-en-scène* of stylish objects in stylish settings. For the more attentive observer, however, there is something slightly out-of-tune about this polished aestheticism, in itself no doubt so pleasantly palatable. One important clue to the source of the uneasiness this film can (and should) produce is the fact that the BBC, showing it, insisted on adding identifying titles to at least some of the spoken texts which

7 Outstanding among his earlier films is *Duncan Grant at Charleston* (1970), already remarkable for its savagely ironic view of the art games of the rich

occur throughout, and which in the original version are all anonymous. Now these texts are of considerable importance, and their anonymity, which Mason had to fight to preserve, perhaps even more so. First of all, they do not constitute a unified discourse. In fact, they are often subtly contradictory on many levels. However, by refusing to *name* the voices of, say, Nikolaus Pevsner or Le Corbusier, as against the 'anonymous' (ie 'official') voice of the Gorell Report, the film produces them all as the collective voice of an era. By refusing to reduce these divergencies to such pat status as individual idiosyncrasy or official conformism, Mason constructs them as ideological *per se*, revealing them as the voice(s) of the nation's cultural and commercial establishment, or of the cosmopolitan intelligentsia of the era. The BBC's naming titles (characteristically reserved for celebrities only) partially succeeded in concealing the contradictory, that is to say the historical, dimension of the film. For if the statements we hear are pinned once and for all on Marcel Breuer, Frank Pick or Gordon Russell, then, as the stock precaution runs, 'opinions expressed will reflect only the views of those who express them', effectively concealing the fact that these words are also potentially attributable to Chamberlain or Ramsay MacDonald, to the City Merchant Banker or the Oxford Don . . . or, most significantly, to one or another of the decorative users of those ash-trays or wearers of those clothes, whose actual representation on the screen constitutes the other problematic, perturbing dimension of this film, in so far as it is also largely unreadable from within the Documentary Ideology.

Indeed, just what is the status of these peopled images which suddenly intrude upon the dead order of this handsome museum? Who is the owner of that elegantly shod foot which treads these extravagantly designed carpets? Who sits smoking in that elegant chair? Do these people have a 'story'? Are they 'characters'? Are they even 'people'? And what, above all, are they doing in this 'documentary'? In a sense, these images break all the 'rules'. Indeed, they are not characters, they are not people, they are the *icons* by which a class represented itself in magazine advertisements, posters, etc. And these beautifully clothed, self-consciously graceful robots lay bare the fundamental reality about all those handsome objects, which are not *devoid of content* as most observers quite predictably supposed: on the contrary, as any comprehensive reading of the film must show, they are traces of the life-style of the then British ruling-class, on the one hand, and the material products of its mercantile requirements on the other.

The visual strategies used by Mason to bring out the mirror relationship between these 'figurines' and their possessions have systematically been misconstrued by dominant critical discourse as 'bad acting' or 'bad directing', because of its traditional quest for 'characters'. Yet that stiffness, sometimes carried to the point at which a doubt arises as to the distinction between animate and

128 in-animate images, provides an aid to reading the film for what it is: a reflection on the way in which the decorative style of the British 1930s and the discourse around it were related to the self-delusion and complacency of a ruling class that was implicating itself in Munich and World War Two. A few bland, quickly interrupted words on the wireless that has played such a voluble role throughout the film, a discreet zoom-in towards a swastika floating among a panoply of 'the flags of the world' on a poster, prepare for a final mannequins' pageant – a beautiful couple make ready to leave their stylishly modern house for a night on the town.

The various forms of censorship (and the word must be taken as much in its Freudian as in its legal sense) encountered by this admirable film, are significant of the power, the durability, of the Documentary Ideology. In a country where it has held sway so completely and for so long, films (especially films produced in Britain) which perturb or question it are likely to be seen with only one eye. It seems almost incredible that a film with such an ironic tone, which so clearly sets the handsomeness of its imagery and editing against dimensions of English history and society which are anything but handsome, should be so easily assimilated as 'an exceptionally charming film', 'a splendid recreation of a charming period', etc . . . or else simply dismissed as 'another of those Arts Council films'. The enormity of these blind spots points to the usefulness of such work in such a country, and of the need for those who take a dissenting view to examine and defend it.

Hogarth and England Home and Beauty are distributed by Concord Films Council, 201 Felixstowe Road, Ipswich, Suffolk.

The Avant-Garde and Narrative
Two SEFT/London Film-Makers Co-op Day Schools

Mick Eaton

'The lamentably derivative watered-down stuff regurgitated by the editors of *Screen* is merely importation from at most three Paris sources, which though at moments useful is not directed correctly, is not made to interact with avant-garde film practice in this country (or any other). Operating thusly in a vacuum as far as avant-garde cinema is concerned, it finds itself, not coincidentally, aligned with dominant cinema with no production capacity of its own.' Peter Gidal 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film' *Studio International* November/December 1975

We do not have to subscribe to the whole of Gidal's thesis to agree that his remarks about *Screen*'s lack of critical interaction with the avant-garde were unfortunately correct at the time of writing. The situation has changed considerably since then. Following the 1976 avant-garde event at the Edinburgh Film Festival there have been an increasing number of articles concerned with avant-garde film practice in *Screen*. More recently two sessions in what is intended to be a series of day schools were co-organised by SEFT and the London Film-Makers Co-op; they were initiated partly as a result of discussions of oppositional film practice within the Independent Film-Makers Association and SEFT. The schools were envisaged both as introductions to films unfamiliar to SEFT members on this side of the Atlantic and as a means of providing for a dialogue between what Peter Wollen has characterised as 'The Two Avant-Gardes' (*Studio International* op cit) polarised round a 'material/signification opposition'. If, however, as Ben Brewster noted in his review of Peter Gidal's 'Structural Film Anthology' (in *Screen* v 17 n 4) the more recent tendency of the two positions to converge has not been without its contradictions, it is perhaps because the terms of

130 the opposition itself can no longer be so clearly delineated. If SEFT must acknowledge embarrassment over its past ignorance of a thriving film practice in this country then no less acknowledgement needs to be made by those theoreticians and practitioners who, again in the past, have characterised SEFT's work as merely a disguised apology for the demands of dominant cinema. Such events are important: questions basic to this dialogue are still very open and while many of them may be familiar they nevertheless deserve to be raised again.

The first of these sessions, held in February 1978, attempted an introduction to the history and development of avant-garde film in North America, as well as an examination of narrativity *vis-à-vis* avant-garde film. The first of these issues is extremely problematic and the second is beset with so much confusion that it has never been adequately grappled with. As to the issue of the development of the avant-garde film in North America, histories have already been written. Indeed the teleology of accounts such as P Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film* (New York 1974) – which outlines the movement from Maya Deren's mythopoeic trance through the subjectivism of Brakhage, to the structural films of Snow, Frampton *et al*, so easily recuperable into the romantic and idealist categories of bourgeois criticism – plus the writings of film-makers themselves, which so often stress the mystique of personal creation and individual vision, suggest that these accounts require rigorous examination by those concerned to give a historical materialist reading to instances of film culture. Perhaps we have been fortunate this side of the Atlantic to have been spared the excesses of this work – one could almost say that in a certain milieu of East Coast art and film criticism what we call the 'avant-garde' is in fact regarded as the 'dominant cinema'. The first problem we are confronted with is how to deal with, even rewrite, this history without being dragged back into either teleology or its accompanying idealism. This is not easily solved when the organisers of such events are faced with making a selection from the vast quantities of significant films available to provide an introduction to a British audience which is less likely to be familiar with the epochs of that particular 'history' than their American counterparts. So if the selection itself implied a teleology, it was one whose terms were more than excusable, both for introductory purposes and as a lead in to the second session focussing on more recent developments in (mainly) British structural-materialist film. The programme moved from early Brakhage through pre-sound Warhol to Sharits and Snow. The choice of the Warhol films in this context (three sections of *13 Most Beautiful Women* (1965) and *Mario Banana* (1964/5)) seemed particularly apposite, not only because they are rarely shown yet undoubtedly influential for later film practice, but also because they articulate with issues of cinematic voyeurism. Each section of the *13 Most Beautiful Women* series consists of a 100 ft take of a woman's

face, filmed in close-up at 24 frames per second. Projected as Warhol instructs at 18 frames per second, they foreground the sadistic gaze of the camera/viewer – the viewer has the sense of controlling the face before him or her on the screen. Whether these films suggest an instance of play upon the pleasure of voyeuristic spectacle of dominant cinema, or, as may be the case with *Mario Banana*, they collapse back into that voyeurism, is problematic, but this in itself indicates that these films raise questions not only in relation to strategies of performance in avant-garde film but to the spectator-text relationship, and should not be relegated to the history of a film practice. 131

The concept of 'narrativity' in discussions of avant-garde cinema is beset with two opposing difficulties. On the one hand the equation of narrative with illusion often made by avant-garde theoreticians and practitioners has allowed for the rejection of the work of such film-makers as Godard and Straub and Huillet as well as the dismissal of the work undertaken by journals such as *Screen* on the problems of narrative following on from the translation of the *Cahiers du Cinema* collective text on *The Young Mr Lincoln* (*Screen* v 13 n 3, reprinted in *Screen Reader* 1, 1977).

On the other hand, a similar confusion can be seen in the equation of narrativity with duration (a property common to all films and foregrounded in much structural-materialist practice) which leads to a misguided attempt to apply the terms of narrative analysis to films specifically attempting to deal in non-narrativity: an attempt which must ultimately lead to a sliding over the specificities of those films. I am not thinking here of *Wavelength* (1967) (which deals with problems of narrative as well as duration) as much as *Zorns Lemma* (1970). The problem of this film seems to revolve not around the extent to which we can supply a linear movement in the film and thus talk of its 'narrative structure', but rather around how one understands its non-narrative system. Of course, this question is not helped by those remarks of Frampton which would seem to lead us to consider the film in terms of the 'narrative' of the artist's autobiography. One reading which Frampton himself provides of *Zorns Lemma* in an interview published in *Structural Film Anthology* (op cit pp 64-77) is of a movement from words, through still photography to the motion picture image (through the recitation of the Bay State Primer, an 18th century alphabet teaching aid, in the first section, through 'pointedly urban' Manhattan shots of the second section, to the rural images of the final section) which mirrors (allegorises?) a movement of his own life. Such an autobiographical account can only, I would suggest, reduce any notion of the specific system set up in the film to one of bogus linearity. One example of this would be the articulation of the two spoken texts in the film. In order to see the movement from the reading of the Bay State Primer by a single female voice over a black screen, to the reading of Bishop Grosseteste's neo-Platonic

132 text in the final section by a female voice at the rate of one word per second over an image of two human figures and a dog walking through the snow away from the camera, in terms of a notion of (narrative?) progress, would we not again be capitulating to a reading of the film, which, though 'correct' in the sense of being sanctioned by the artist, is none the less mystical for all that? The importance of this is in what it implies about the contribution *Screen* can make to avant-garde film practice: which lies not, I would argue, in providing readings of films already canonised in the history of the avant-garde as much as in dealing with the construction of the spectator in relation to the avant-garde film-text. It may well be that the space constructed by a 'non-narrative' film like *Zorns Lemma* for the reader, or indeed for the author, is achieved differently from that constructed in the terms of the dominant cinema, nevertheless the specificities of its construction need to be analysed. (On this point see Al Rees 'Conditions of Illusion', *Screen* v 18 n 3) Another example of this reduction to narrative analysis could be given in relation to Sharits *T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G.* (1968). Should the fact that this film offers itself up for psychoanalytic interpretation (a reading I am not anxious to elaborate; suffice it to say that the film could be read as a posing of a problem of castration in for instance the positive and negative images of the young man cutting his tongue with scissors, which is repressed and thereby 'solved' by the gradual spelling out, letter by letter of the word 'touching') allow us to privilege that reading as a kind of 'master-code' which would ultimately lead us to say 'this is just like a narrative film'? Granted, similar problems may be posed but they should not be allowed to dominate the other problems of construction the film presents.

The second session, held in May, freed from the constraints of providing a history, attempted to deal with some of the above questions, concentrating, as I have already mentioned, on structural-materialist film, particularly its development in Britain. A decision had been taken at the previous session not to invite film-makers such as Le Grice and Gidal as speakers. While this was useful in avoiding the privileging of the film-makers' opinions and presence it was thought by some who attended this session that it allowed instead the privileging of certain texts, of which Peter Gidal's own 'Theory and Definitions of Structural-Materialist Film' (op cit) was the most significant. It is therefore necessary to enter the Cottringer/Gidal debate (Ann Cottringer's article appears in *Afterimage* n 6; Gidal's reply is in preparation), an entry which involves further consideration of the 'material/signification opposition'. Obviously one of the polemics of Gidal's extremely polemical piece is a rejection of the kind of analysis Sitney made of structural film, seen in terms of consciousness, eg:

'the structural film approaches the condition of a MEDITATION

and evokes states of consciousness without MEDITATION; that is with the sole mediation of the camera' (Sitney op cit p 408)

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and to instate materialism in a dialectical rather than a mechanical sense, it is disputable whether he does in fact achieve that aim. If Gidal's theorisation does ultimately collapse materialism into materiality (physicality) then this collapse leads us back to the late sixties American situation where paradoxically the term 'materialism' hides an essentialist quest for the ultimate matter of film; film as film rather than film as production of meaning; the material of film rather than the production of signification.

Gidal says in the beginning of his article: 'The dialectic of the film is established in that space of tension between materialist flatness, grain, light, movement and the supposed real reality that is represented' (op cit p 189). Again I feel that the danger of a structural-materialist aesthetic lies in placing too great an emphasis on the former terms without adequately coming to terms with the latter. If this course is adopted it can certainly only lead to a stifling of that very dialectic whose terms are obviously so vital in any interventionist practice. In fact, a concentration in film practice on substance over signification can lead to a retreat, not only from editing, as Anne Cottringer has specified, but also from performance, verbal language and writing. We have to ask ourselves how politically viable at the present time is a cinema which rejects non-cinematic codes? The issue of performance is not as trivial as it may appear. Although 'acting' as a representational code is, of course, non-cinematic, it has been fused with cinematic codes since the earliest days of cinema and the transparency and seeming inevitability of this fusion will not be ruptured by denying this history. When Gidal talks of 'identification' it is clear, as Cottringer has pointed out, that he sees this as a process of 'identification with characters' rather than 'identification with space'. Even so, it seems dangerous to proscribe a film practice which does attempt to deal dialectically with the processes of performance (the films by Le Grice, Gidal and Sinden, shown at the school do not) if only because in the most naïve and sociologicistic sense this mechanism of identification is one of the most crucial means by which cinemas are filled. To reject this as an issue not pertinent to the matter of film seems to indicate not only an unwillingness to intervene in what, for a large number of cinema-goers is the very matter of film – ie stories, characters etc – but also the impossibility of any kind of Brechtian practice, in which what is represented enters into a dialectic with the way in which it is represented. Here I am not trying to reduce the argument to a ludicrous statement such as 'the matter of political film is the profilmic event', nor to suggest that the only 'correct' film practice is to be found in the work of film-makers such as Godard, Straub and Huillet or Oshima. Indeed the question of performance is something which

134 avant-garde film practice has dealt with in the past, for example in the work of Warhol (especially in the performance of the 'superstars') and more recently in the work of Stephen Dwoskin in Europe, and Roger Jacoby in the United States). Again I must make it clear that I am not presenting these as examples of a 'correct' film practice, but merely suggesting that perhaps it is not necessary for the structural-materialist film-maker to reject dealing with performance, or indeed other non-cinematic codes in advance. Surely such rejections must lead also to a gross simplification of the spectator-text relationship.

Whilst Gidal speaks of the 'ambiguity' of the identification process in dominant cinema he sees this as ultimately serving only to re-inscribe the individual viewer as 'the subject of self-expression and self-representation through the mediation of a repressive ideological structure' (op cit p 190). Thus, in dominant cinema spectators are said to become a fixed passive consumer continually reproducing themselves in the terms of that repressive ideology. There is no indication here that the contradictions implicit in that very ambiguity can be exploited to break the passivity. Again *Screen's* work on the film-text must enter into the debate, not only to expose this formulation as a little too sweeping, but also to argue that its work does not, in fact, constitute an alignment with dominant cinema, but rather acts as a crucial political intervention. Even if we accept Deke Dusinberre's characterisation of Peter Gidal's rhetorical strategy as an attempt to mirror in prose the 'dissolution of the speaking subject in Gidal's film-making' ('Consistent Oxymoron: the Rhetorical Strategy of Peter Gidal', *Screen* v 18 n 2) it was the admitted confusions, contradictions and inconsistencies produced by that strategy that were the starting point for discussion at least at the second session. If the impossible demands Gidal makes of theory ('that theory should enable one to "watch oneself watching"') Ben Brewster op.cit) is purely a rhetorical strategy and his use of quotation from Brecht, Derrida, Althusser etc is revealed 'not as pretentious name-dropping nor as theoretical substantiation' but rather as a 'collage effect' (Dusinberre op cit p 84) constituting an attack on a certain kind of academic text, which seems to be associated with *Screen*, then there remain serious problems about the language in which this debate should be conducted, and also about the future direction of this series of day schools, if the work of SEFT and *Screen* is to interact more productively with avant-garde film practices in this country. One final point, however, which was raised at the end of the last session, deserves to be mentioned here – the fact that any discussion of questions relating to finance, distribution and exhibition was conspicuous by its absence. Unless these issues are taken into account no discussion of the political effects of cultural practices can advance.

Foreground and Background A Reply to Paul Willemen

Edward Branigan

Paul Willemen raises a number of crucial issues in his 'Notes on Subjectivity: On Reading Edward Branigan's "Subjectivity Under Siege"' (*Screen* v 19 n 1 Spring 1978). On the whole his article is a stimulating, thoughtful appraisal of some complex problems in contemporary film theory. Although I cannot address all of these problems, I would like to pinpoint several areas where our methods of analysis most differ. These areas involve the concept of a background set, the status of character, and the ideology of a text.

I

Willemen appears to have little patience for background sets. For him Federico Fellini's *8½* (1963) and Nagisa Oshima's *The Story of a Man Who Left His Will on Film* (Tokyo Senso Sengo Hiwa) (1970) 'have nothing in common other than that both are part of the cinema as an institution' (p 55; page reference to my article in the same issue will be given as 'Branigan, p -'). Character in the Oshima film is 'not redefined, it is made irrelevant' (p 44); the construction of a coherent fiction with characters is 'more than just impossible in the so-called modern text: it has become literally im-pertinent (sic)' (p 54). Willemen believes that in the face of such a 'radical heterogeneity' (p 42), a pure difference between the two films, any attempt at comparison must utterly fail (pp 54-55). But is it true that the films have 'nothing in common'? Although Willemen acknowledges that both are part of the cinema as an 'institution', what exactly is covered by that term? He does not say.

My assumption is that while the films are different *orders* of

136 discourse, they are nonetheless discourse (signifying practice) and susceptible to analysis as such. If one seeks to avoid an object-centred analysis (a single term, eg essence or substance) and instead concentrate on relationships (two terms), one must, explicitly or implicitly, define a reference point or background set against which to measure difference. The assumption is that meaning is not *a priori* but depends on differential position. Stephen Heath in analysing another Oshima film, *Ai No Corrida* (*In the Realm of the Senses*) (1976), uses as a comparison practice a definition of classical discourse and Max Ophuls' *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) ('The Question Oshima' *Wide Angle* v 2 n 1 1977 pp 48-57). When Willemsen denies that modernism can be compared to classical discourse, he seems to be asking what modernism is, rather than asking how it relates to its (historical) ground, that is, other symbolic systems. In short, Willemsen's question seems ahistorical. Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblance' (Branigan p 38) is important because it provides a way of escaping 'necessary and sufficient' conditions in order to concentrate on relationships and features which cut across different texts, indeed, across culture when it too is considered as text. It is not enough to enshrine the Oshima film as radical difference, for here difference, by a curious twist, has become a new object-label. How can there be absolute, total difference? Difference depends on (its displacement from) similarity, and hence there is only relative difference. Willemsen in fact contradicts the alleged radical difference of the Oshima film when he says that in the film 'coherent unities are evoked only to be exploded' (p 54) and modernism is a 'critique of, not a neutral alternative to, dominant aesthetic practices' (p 56). To speak of modernism as an evocation and a critique of classicism is to admit an element of similarity, for how else can modernism summon features of another order of discourse? Is not the radical gap that Willemsen posits between the Fellini and Oshima texts thereby narrowed?

I think there are good reasons for selecting the classical Hollywood cinema as a reference point. Such a choice does not assign it a normative value, nor imply that it is neutral to value when other sorts of questions are asked, but merely recognises it as a dominant historical form and descriptive reference. Noël Burch, however, collapses its use as reference with an evaluation when he calls Hollywood cinema the 'zero point of cinematic style' (*Theory of Film Practice* New York 1973 p 15). Willemsen is correct when he says that measuring relationships does not positively say what modernism is: nevertheless, the measurement of its departure from a historical norm provides some characterisation of modernism as a historical practice even though selecting another norm provides a different characterisation. The Russian Formalists were not alarmed by a prospect of uncertainty in definition, because changes

in artistic practice were tied to changing background sets (i.e. change as a reaction against norms rather than due to 'great men' and 'influences').

Willemen asserts that my analysis views the Oshima film as merely the flip side of the Fellini film (pp 42, 54). This is true, however, only in a world ruled by binary oppositions; the negation of one then gives the other. Willemen interprets my analysis in this manner because he is operating under the harsh dichotomy classical/modern rather than attempting to sort features, elements, and processes of textual practice. Such a dichotomy not only denies the Fellini film what Roland Barthes would term its 'limited plural' (*S/Z* New York 1974; and see Stephen Heath's analysis of *Touch of Evil* in 'Film and System: Terms of Analysis', in *Screen* v 16 nn1 and 2, Spring and Summer 1975), but spawns the hope that one day we shall find the totally open work, transgressive beyond measure (see Branigan p 25). Willemen's misunderstanding of 'impossible camera positions' (p 44) is also illustrative. 'Impossible' here is not a test for modernism, but simply a textual feature (the denial of a convention) which may assume numerous functions in different systems. Willemen seems to concede as much when he states that 'tabulating formal devices and procedures' is a 'necessary though limited' task in locating texts in history (pp 55-56). Willemen refers here to my previous work on Ozu Yasujiro which, of course, was not meant to be exhaustive. I intend in the future to consider other aspects of Ozu's films and specifically address the problems raised by Willemen and others about ideology and narrative in Ozu's films.

II

The problem of background sets is also implicated in the second issue I wish to discuss: the status of character. For me it is a relational concept. In the Oshima text character is constructed on a set of permutations, is nonlinear (Branigan, pp 17, 39), and hence destroys the concept of character as employed in the Fellini film. I make it plain that the Oshima film challenges that coherence which has been called 'character'. Willemen, however, objects to such statements as '... [the Oshima film presents] in some sense, two different forms of the same character' (p 55; Branigan, p 9). The reference to 'same' character seems to return us to the traditional idea of character as a copy of a real person, thereby pulling the Oshima film back onto the terrain of classical discourse. What I mean by 'same' is 'nominally the same'; that is, the same actor and actress appear throughout the film, their names remain the same (Motoki, Yasuko), other characters in the film take them to be the same (ie the text remembers itself), etc, and yet we discover that narrative contradictions cannot be unified at a higher

138 dimension of these characters through, say, split personality or schizophrenia. The whole thrust of the Oshima film is not to tell two stories about two pairs of characters but to tell two (contradictory) stories about the same pair of characters where the question acutely posed is the splitting of the subject under contradictory social forces. If the characters are not at least 'nominally the same' then there are really two stories about four characters and one never faces the central issue of the subject in ideology. Matters could perhaps be clarified by considering what one means by 'character' in a text. I understand character as a construction of any text, including classical texts, along the lines, say, of Barthes' semic code (S/Z op cit) or Heath's character code in film which recognises five functions: agent, character, person, image, figure ('Film and System' part II pp 101-107). Both of these approaches deny a pre-existent unity to character. In Heath's terms, the Oshima film is fundamentally about character at the level of person, the *body*: What does it mean to deny the coherence of the body and its name? How is the subject something other under social practice?

Now the question arises, with a new critical understanding of 'character', why not simply abandon the term character? It seems to me, in general, that any radically new theory is faced with two choices: either retain an old term but radically redefined or else invent a new name to refer to the new understanding. Much can be said in favour of both choices. I usually choose, however, to redefine an old term for the reason that it places a lesser burden initially on a reader and because the problem which the term addresses often remains, whatever it is called. One criterion used in selecting between two theories is the extent to which a new theory will contain, approximately, the established results of an older theory. This principle is known as 'correspondence' (see *Correspondence Principle and Growth of Science*, Wladyslaw Krajewski, Hingham, Mass. 1977; K R Popper *Objective Knowledge* Oxford 1972 p 202). As an example of correspondence, one can say that Einstein's relativity theory contains Newton's classical mechanics as a special case. My point is that simply because there is a new, broader understanding of character, does not mean that the term should be abandoned nor that its use inevitably returns us to an older theory. I agree entirely with Willemen that the concept of 'point of view' is complicit with a communication theory of representation (pp 48ff). Where I do not agree is that the usefulness of the concept is over. The history of the concept should be carefully examined and a new definition formulated. I am presently at work on these projects. Incidentally, one must go further and simultaneously rethink other basic critical terms such as camera, author, and art.

Finally, a comment on the issue of ideology. It appears that Willemen confuses my definition of ideology, which applies to all texts, with one of the elements of representation used in the classical text which I term 'mind' (pp 46-47; Branigan, pp 10-11, 31ff). The two concepts are on different levels of generality. 'Mind', I contend, is a reading hypothesis – one of the conditions of intelligibility of the classic text. Memory, for example, is represented as the coherence of the traditional flashback. I say 'is represented' and not 'is' because the question I am asking is epistemological, not ontological or metaphysical. 'Mind' is a *cultural* fact used to generate and decode certain systems of meaning. The traditional point-of-view shot, to take another example, depends for its intelligibility on the mere presence or existence of a character (of a character's mind). Now consider a point-of-view shot which purports to represent the views of a snake, an invisible spirit, or even of a dead man. In these deviant cases mind is taken in a metaphorical sense to represent the coherence of the representation. Understanding by a viewer, here, depends on the metaphorical transfer, not on whether such a transfer is plausible nor on whether 'mind' can be said to exist in the first place. To return to literal point-of-view shots, the challenge of the Oshima text is as follows: What is a point-of-view shot when the text fails to create that 'character' whose view it is?

I find it odd that the category of mind provokes such dismay in Willemen when the other elements of classical representation (origin, vision, etc) which I define and use are equally loaded ideologically. About these he says nothing. The point in utilising these terms, however, is precisely to avoid the simple form/content split where a content is supplied by neutral forms and ideological criticism is confined to 'themes'. Instead I attempt to define the representing activity itself as grounded in ideological assumptions. Jacques Derrida and psychoanalytic criticism, for example, have strongly addressed issues of origin and vision. Ideology, ultimately, is not this or that (represented) thing – an image, idea, mind, etc – but a process of representing, displaying the significance of the world. Significance is not *a priori* but depends on a subject's relation to that thing. Therefore ideology is simultaneously a placing of the individual, the body, into a meaningful (possible) relation with the world. For the classic text that activity involves not just 'mind', but six elements of representation. The Oshima text, then, is located not as an autonomous practice, but in the way in which it resists a background set of reading terms which have themselves been produced at a historical juncture.

140 *Editorial Note:* There are a number of errors in Edward Branigan's original article in *Screen* v 19 n 1 which we would like to call to the attention of readers:

1 p 11, l 17: 'provides the *unity* of the representation' not unit;

2 still 8 should appear in the place of still 10 and vice-versa;

3 p 23, l 11: should read still 6 not still 9;

4 p 24, l 31: 'character *exits* in one shot' not exists;

5 p 34, l 31: the third ending where Guido becomes an author should be ' $(\bar{S}+ -S)$ ' not $(S+ -\bar{S})$.

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